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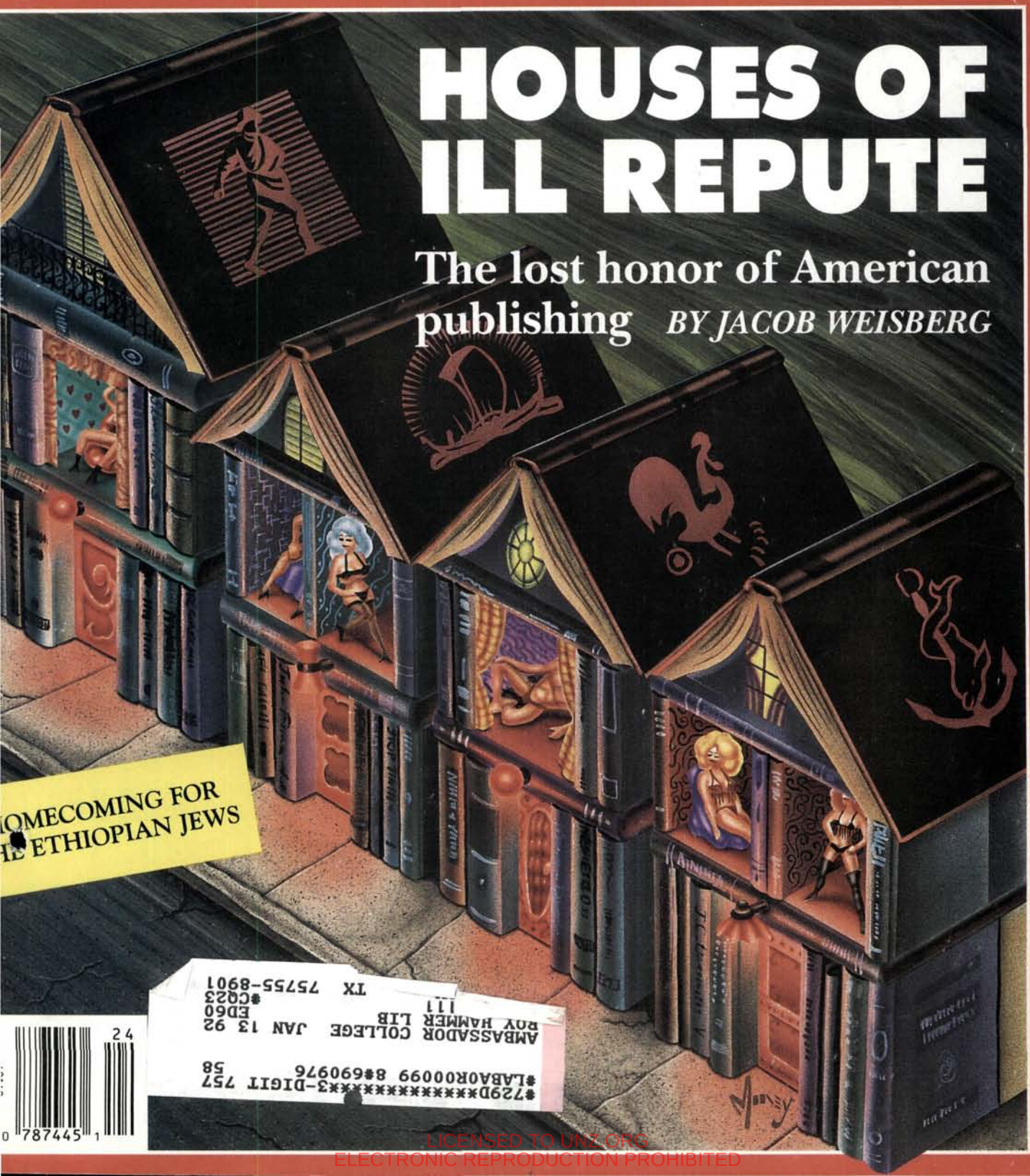

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JUNE 17, 1991

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Cover by Gerry Mooney for THE NEW REPUBLIC. Article on page 16.

4 **MICHAEL KINSLEY** TRB: ONLY CORRECT The most-read column in *The New York Times.*

6 **CORRESPONDENCE** Why South Africa needs full-blown democracy, &c.

7 **THE EDITORS** THE BAKER FALLACY The secretary of state's continuing delusions about peace in the Middle East. NOTEBOOK The kid who said 'no' to Harvard, &c.

10 **FRED BARNES** WHITE HOUSE WATCH: DICK AND GEORGE The strange love affair between President Bush and House Majority Leader Richard Gephardt.

11 **RICHARD Z. CHESNOFF** JERUSALEM POSTCARD: EXODUS The flight of the Falashas.

12 **JONATHAN RAUCH** WAR PROFITEERS How America made money on the Gulf war.

14 **SCOTT SHUGER** THE PRESS: HORSE JACUZZIS Real estate porn in the *LA Times.*

16 **JACOB WEISBERG** ROUGH TRADE Editors don't edit anymore, books are too long, and no one bothers to read them anyway. How did book publishing fall so far so fast?

20 **DAVID GREENBERG** FLOPPY FLOP Literary prestige for sale—on diskette.

22 **ARTURO CRUZ JR. AND CONSUELO CRUZ SEQUEIRA** AS THE WORLD TURNS Nicaragua's longest-running soap opera won't let democracy disturb its plot line.

28 **STANLEY KAUFFMANN** ON FILMS: TYPES *City Slickers* is mostly gimmickry; the stars of *Backdraft,* all about firemen, are Donald Sutherland and the special effects people.

29 **ELIOT A. COHEN** IN DOD WE TRUST *The Commanders* by Bob Woodward

36 **RICHARD A. POSNER** COURTING EVIL *Hitler's Justice: The Courts of the Third Reich* by Ingo Müller

42 **CHRISTOPHER BENFEY** PORTRAITS AND PUZZLES *Flow Chart* by John Ashbery

43 **DAVID RAY** POEM *Two for Eschatology*

48 **ANNE TYLER** MOSCOW ON THE SEINE *The Tattered Cloak and Other Novels* by Nina Berberova, translated by Marian Schwartz

50 **SIDNEY BLUMENTHAL** WASHINGTON DIARIST: CLEAN VICTORY War heroes and zeros.

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FROM WASHINGTON

Only correct

The New York Times recently ran the following item in its popular "Corrections" column:

> An article in The Living Section on April 24 about yerba maté, a Paraguayan beverage, referred imprecisely to a group of herbs used medicinally in Paraguay. Some of them, including palo santo and naranjo, have Spanish names.

Now, that is magnificent. It has everything one looks for in a correction: lyricism, romance, pathos, mystery. In two brief sentences, on a page otherwise devoted to the routine betrayals of diplomats and politicians, one is plunged into a world of exotic beverages and medicinal herbs.

Like all great corrections, this one hints at—but does not totally reveal—two dramas: the making of the original error and the making of the correction itself. Thus the mind indulges in delightful speculation. What desperation of consumer novelty-seeking reduced the *Times*'s Living Section to writing about Paraguayan refreshments? Down what byway had we wandered to be misinformed that certain Paraguayan medicinal herbs don't have Spanish names? What oversensitive Hispanophile took such umbrage at this implication that he or she demanded a correction, and why was he or she not told to go away and drink a yerba maté? And then, as a final delight, there is the note of grudging contrition ("referred imprecisely"), especially prized by corrections connoisseurs.

As self-flagellation has come into fashion in American journalism, corrections have blossomed. Most major papers now run a box full of them every day, along with variants such as "clarifications" and "editor's notes." The *Times* ran the ultimate correction the other day: a front-page story headlined "Correction: On Gorbachev Aid Plea for Billions," discussing at length the full implications of the newspaper's failure (along with "some other publications") to detect that Gorbo was only being theoretical when he mentioned the figure $100 billion.

I read corrections avidly. Not solely in the spirit of schadenfreude—we all make mistakes—but as a sort of poetry. Corrections are the haiku of journalism: short, rich in imagery, hedged about by rigid stylistic rules.

The main rule, imposed most rigidly by the *Times* (but not invariably even there), is that the correction should avoid repeating the original error. The purpose is high-minded, but the effect is often exotic or comic as the author tries to characterize the nature of the mistake without letting on what exactly it was. An example from my collection: "A report in the Style Makers column on May 20 about Judith Neidermaier, a display designer in Chicago, misstated her role in creating mannequins shaped like wooden clothespins for the Fendi boutique in New York. . . ." One could dig up the May 20 *Times* to learn what Ms. Neidermaier's role in the creation of mannequins shaped like wooden clothespins was wrongly alleged to be. But how could the actual allegation compare to the options the imagination provides?

Although most *Times* readers, like me, may have skipped that article "about shoes and handbags for evening," who could fail to be charmed by the correction (which, like most poetry, is best read aloud)?

> The affected paragraph should have read: "Bergdorf's has Carey Adina's satin trapezoid in fuchsia, chartreuse, purple, or bright blue with a jeweled clasp and a stiff handle ($425); Paloma Picasso's asymmetric heart-shaped bag in rose or black with a golden globe on the handle ($565), and a Bergdorf-label pyramid in gold satin with a handle of gilded rope ($280)."

Of all corrections, the least interesting to connoisseurs are the ones addressing mere typographical errors, such as the classic missing "not." But even connoisseurs are not above enjoying the slapstick effect of certain editing mistakes, such as the *Times* attributing the comment that it was "fashionable to be racist" during the Reagan administration to Lee Atwater instead of Spike Lee. Last November the *Times* had to correct an article about former drug czar William Bennett and Representative Charles Rangel: "It was Mr. Bennett who called Mr. Rangel a 'gasbag,' not the other way around."

A while back, *The Washington Post* ran a correction admitting it had misquoted the same Bill Bennett "in saying his brother and his mother 'are the two best counselors I've got.' The quotation should have cited his brother and his

continued on page 49

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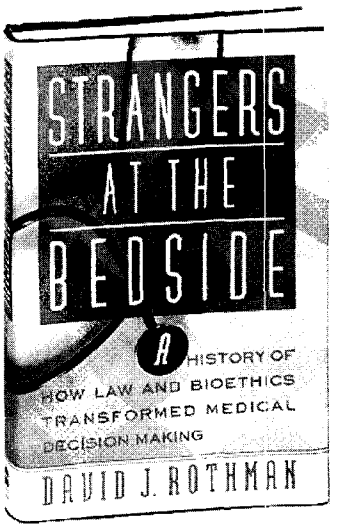

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CORRESPONDENCE

P.C. (cont'd.)

To the editors:

Regarding Michael Kinsley's piece on political correctness on campus ("P.C. B.S.," TRB, May 20): in the 1950s faculty and students were harassed, dismissed, and blacklisted for not signing loyalty oaths and for professing politically incorrect ideas. The president of the United States at the time gave no speech condemning it.

In the 1960s students were teargassed, beaten, and even shot for expressing politically incorrect or unpopular ideas. The president of the United States gave no speech condemning it, and, arguably, even encouraged it. So if in the 1990s there is a mild, if no less unfortunate, atmosphere of intimidation toward certain unpopular or politically incorrect ideas, it hardly seems cause for presidential proclamations, like the one George Bush made recently in Michigan. For that matter, if our president is so concerned about protecting unpopular political or politically incorrect ideas on campuses, where was he when a student from Seton Hall was booed off the basketball court for not wearing the American flag on his uniform?

ADAM SIMON
Malibu, California
(Via 900 number)

Democracy for beginners

To the editors:

I appreciate the many flattering things said by George Frederickson in his review of my book *A Democratic South Africa?* ("Rights and Wrongs," May 13), but I am dismayed by his neglect of the findings of thirty years of research on ethnicity and democracy, in Africa and elsewhere. This neglect has unfortunate consequences for evaluating South Africa's prospects.

Mr. Frederickson taxes me with an inadequate appreciation of the impact of industrial capitalism on ethnic identities in South Africa. But where has capitalist development eased the problem of accommodating diverse ethnic groups? In Northern Ireland? In the industrialized Basque country of Spain? In Quebec? Anyone who knows the history of ethnicity in Africa will have a strong sense of déjà vu, because Mr. Frederickson's argument was made in the 1950s and '60s, even as evidence was accumulating that industrialization in places like the Zambian Copperbelt was not producing what was then called "detribalization." As I point out in the book, Soweto is the most successful ethnic melting pot in South Africa, and even it has been the scene of serious Xhosa-Zulu violence. Ethnic sentiments are far stronger in other townships and in rural areas, and when white rule goes, so will a major force that makes black solidarity urgent.

Equally reminiscent of an earlier time is Mr. Frederickson's plea that we not judge South Africa by the standards of liberal democracy, but be "more flexible and relativistic." The same plea was made for Kwame Nkrumah's one-party state in Ghana and for Milton Obote's in Uganda before Mr. Nkrumah's jails were emptied and before Mr. Obote's autocracy gave way to Idi Amin. All over the continent, Africans are demonstrating their desire for liberal democracy, and people like Mr. Frederickson are prepared to fail them again. He thinks South Africa could become a second-best semi-democracy like Botswana, but, as I explain in the book, there is no chance for this in South Africa's more heterogeneous and complex conditions. The realistic alternatives are liberal democracy or a single-party state. No doubt South Africa's enormous problems make the attainment of liberal democracy very difficult, but they do not justify abandoning the attempt in advance.

Finally, a factual point needs correction: Mr. Frederickson says I "apparently understate" the gap in earnings between whites and Africans, because a study by Stephen Lewis (which I cite) makes the gap 8.9 to 1 in 1985 rather than under 3.5 to 1, as I said it was in 1986. My figures are not contradicted by Lewis. Lewis's figure of 8.9 relates to *income*, including income from ownership, and of course whites own the South African economy. On the very same page of the Lewis book that Mr. Frederickson cites, Mr. Lewis places the wage *earnings* figure at 3.8 to 1 in 1985. I conclude by saying

continued on page 49

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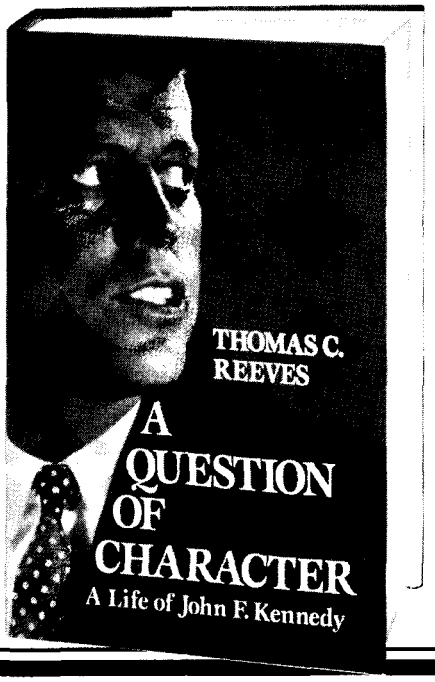

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

JUNE 17, 1991

THE BAKER FALLACY

Apparently Secretary of State James Baker no longer believes that the building of settlements by Israelis in the occupied territories is the biggest "obstacle to peace" in the Middle East. He had dolorously informed the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee of this on May 23, but on the very next day, stung by criticism, he judiciously confided to a member of the Senate Appropriations subcommittee that "there are other obstacles that are every bit as big."

This quintessential—and hasty—Baker positioning should not, however, be taken seriously as an index of what in the deep recesses of his mind he really thinks about the tangled conflict between Arabs and Jews. His May 23 statement was not, after all, his first churlish comment against Israel, but just one in a long series of outbursts that more accurately reflect his settled convictions on this historic dispute. Coming to his job without really knowing anything in particular about the region, it is these preconceptions that have dominated his diplomacy ever since.

Take the question of the settlements. We have never thought that Jewish habitations in thickly populated Arab areas are politically wise or even strategically necessary. But the enlightened orthodoxy in this country that no Jews should be permitted to live among the Palestinian Arabs is a strained conceit. Would the same people be arguing that Palestinian Arabs be similarly banned from living in Israel? The settlements are, to be sure, an annoyance, even an affront—to the Arabs and to Mr. Baker. But it is absurd to believe that their existence is the linchpin to progress in the region, and that if they were to disappear tomorrow, all problems would be easier to solve.

"Nothing has made my job of finding Arab and Palestinian partners in Israel more difficult [than the settlements]," claimed Secretary Baker. Nothing. Is he suggesting that in the absence of settlements, the finding of such partners would be a simpler task? Does he believe that merely because Israel has increased the Jewish population in the territories from 5 percent to 6 percent of the total, otherwise eager Arab negotiators are suddenly reluctant to come forward? If anything, the opposite is the case: the trauma wrought upon these political interlocutors by Jewish mobile homes dotting the landscape should heighten their eagerness for a deal, spur them to come forward sooner rather than later in order to put an end to their peril.

The truth is, of course, that these would-be interlocutors would rather let Washington negotiate the settlements away for them, without the exacting and reciprocal concessions that face-to-face peace talks with Israel require. For Mr. Baker, the settlements are a convenient alibi for his failure to produce any Arabs at all for serious negotiations. Indeed, the settlements are for him an indispensable hypothesis. Without the settlements to point to, he would have to accept the grimmer truth: that the Gulf states—Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in particular—are still unwilling to break the taboo against sitting down with representatives of a Jewish state to hash out anything, let alone a regional peace. Mr. Baker is left with the unelevating task of insisting that an observer delegated from the Gulf Cooperative Council to talk about the environment or water scarcity at some future conference is the moral equivalent of the House of Saud negotiating peace with Israel. At best he would have to accept that Saudis have little incentive to offend their Muslim fundamentalists by dealing with Israel in order to win something for the Palestinians about whom, especially after the Gulf war, the kingdom cares a fig.

Messrs. Baker and Bush, of course, are no novices in misreading the Middle East. The two of them were long convinced of Saddam Hussein's moderation, before their August surprise of last year. In fact, the secretary seemed to think that Saddam was amenable to reason right up until January 15. Undeterred by his calamitous misreadings, Mr. Baker now ignores—and our emissary in Beirut has been complicit in—Hafez Assad's recent de facto absorption of Lebanon into Syria. Mr. Baker shows no understanding of Israel's concern about As-

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sad's still ravenous appetite, or of the Israelis' consequent reluctance to restore the ridges above the Galilee to Assad's control.

And in all this—especially on the matter of those stiff-necked Israelis—Mr. Baker knows he has the sympathetic but undiscerning ear of the president. That is why this slow learner—or rather willful innocent—at State condones every Arab excuse for holding back from his negotiations, but constructs Israel's reasons, and Israel's alone, as obstructionist.

Once not so long ago, James Baker was said to have forsworn the endless shuttle diplomacy through which Henry Kissinger carried the antagonists past the impasse after the Yom Kippur War. George Shultz, slightly green at the beginning, also tried to see through the contrived ambiguities of regional politics to what is possible, and what is not. Both of Mr. Baker's predecessors finally had a firm grasp of the intrinsic limits of politics in the Middle East. Not so Mr. Baker himself, who wants to impose his own vision on the protagonists, come what may.

Of course, his vision really asks nothing of the Arab states. They are the beneficiaries in his scenario—and it is a screenplay in which the Israelis will understandably refuse star billing. They do not expect that the hatred for Jews in the Arab world will be excised by diplomacy. But they will insist that diplomacy actually recognizes this hatred as a fact of life that makes it more than imprudent for Israel to make itself vulnerable. In the meantime, every skewed and petulant reproach of Israel by Mr. Baker only enhances the power of the growing minority in that country which takes this hatred as an excuse to do everything that exacerbates it.

NOTEBOOK

MOTHER'S MILK: This week's editorial argues that Israeli settlements in the West Bank are not the primary obstacle to peace in the Middle East. Do you agree or disagree? Cast your vote by calling our Sound Off line, at 1-900-726-6671.... Our poll two weeks ago found 57 percent agreeing with Michael Kinsley's contention that the fuss over moderate drinking during pregnancy is overblown, 43 percent opposed.

PASSAGE IN INDIA: Grieving people are not always wise people, but in the case of Sonya Gandhi wisdom has accompanied grief. Her decision not to accept the mantle of the Congress Party and take her murdered husband Rajiv's place in the June elections represents a moment of truth for Indian democracy. It is always said that India is the largest democracy in the world, and by some standards it surely is. But what kind of democracy is it that has been ruled, for almost the entire history of the state, by a single party, which has itself been ruled by a single family? Dynasties are not democratic things, even when they are ratified by ballots; and ballots, even hundreds of millions of them, are not all that is needed for a genuine democracy. The death of Rajiv Gandhi throws his party into a long-needed and much-deferred condition of crisis. The Congress Party in India is finally having to face the consequences of its cronyist politics, and not a moment too soon. In its campaigns of recent years, moreover, it has not hesitated to play with fire—to prey on India's terrifying ethnic tensions, and pit one ethnic group against another. The BJP, the right-wing, xenophobic, militant Hindu party that waits in the wings, only profits from the Congress's opportunism. At the present moment in India's history, as Akeel Bilgrami showed in last week's TNR ("Cry, the Beloved Subcontinent"), nothing is more irresponsible. Sonya's refusal to rule may mark at least the beginnings of honesty about what truly ails their socially, economically, ethnically, and religiously riven country.

HIV-NEGATIVE: When it came time to do something credible about the spiraling use of assault weapons, the Bush administration chose to do nothing but ban some imported ones. With around a million Americans infected with HIV, the president has taken another tough stand: he has retained the ban on people with the virus entering the United States. The ban makes no medical sense: HIV cannot be casually transmitted and there's no discernible public health threat in allowing HIV-positive people to visit or settle in this country. It only makes political sense in the narrowest, cheapest way: it's an easy ploy to appease the homophobic far right, and no Americans are affected. In recent months the great AIDS controversies have involved the minuscule risk posed to patients by HIV-positive doctors; the even tinier risk of getting AIDS through organ transplants; and now the imperceptible threat posed to Americans by admitting HIV-positive foreigners. It's now ten years to the week since the AIDS virus was first discovered. Is it too much to ask that we finally stop playing the politics of hysteria with this epidemic?

JOE COLLEGE: One of last week's "Voices of the New Generation" on *The New York Times* op-ed page was a recent high school graduate from Baltimore named William Desmond. His essay: "I'm Not Going to Harvard." His reason: "Many teachers I saw did not strike me as the world-renowned experts described by admissions offices. Most students seemed more concerned with weekend parties than with their courses or reading. To them, college was a place to get away from the restraints of parents." Young William was much more impressed by Baltimore's Loyola College, with its "quiet commitment to the individual and to the humanities." The next day a few other reasons were inadvertently revealed in an unrelated news story about fi-

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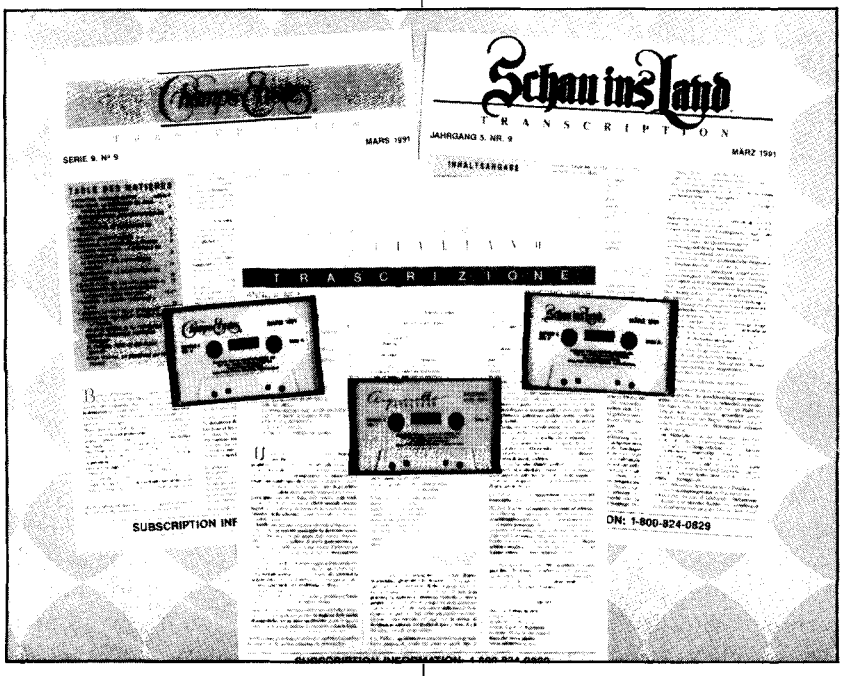

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nancial aid. According to one Maria G. Desmond of Baltimore, "Her son has turned down all three offers [Harvard, Princeton, and Yale] to attend Loyola of Baltimore, where his tuition is free because both his parents teach there." And where, one assumes, he can also borrow the station wagon on Friday nights. ●

WHITE HOUSE WATCH

DICK AND GEORGE

By Fred Barnes

At 7 a.m. one Saturday in 1990, President Bush telephoned Dan Rostenkowski, the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee. Rostenkowski's wife, LaVerne, was in town for the Gridiron Club dinner, and the couple was staying at a Washington hotel. "Why don't you come see us?" Bush said. Rostenkowski spruced himself up and headed for the White House, alone. "Where's you wife?" Bush asked him. "You didn't mention her," Rostenkowski replied. Bush sent him back to get his wife. The Rostenkowskis spent the morning at the White House and stayed for lunch. Bush has friendly ties with other senior Democrats too. The weekend after the congressional vote on war with Iraq, he invited House Speaker Tom Foley and his wife, Heather, to Camp David for the weekend. When Bush flies to Kennebunkport for holidays, he offers rides to Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell, who's from Maine.

The politics of chumminess does not extend to House Majority Leader Richard Gephardt. For him, there have been no private soirees with George and Barbara, only two South Lawn mob scenes billed as barbecues for everyone in Congress, and the state dinner for Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev on May 31, 1990. "I don't think I'm their favorite person," says Gephardt. True, but Bush's attitude toward Gephardt has changed dramatically. He once dismissed Gephardt as crassly partisan and irritating. Now Bush respects him as fair-minded, decent, and serious. More important, the White House has concluded that Gephardt is the one Democrat on Capitol Hill who can't be ignored. "If you want to do something with Democrats, you've by and large got to deal with Gephardt," says a senior official.

To win "fast track" authority on trade treaties, Bush had little choice. The trade measure, which prevents Congress from amending and thus obstructing trade agreements, is Bush's top legislative priority this year. In fact, it's practically his only priority, which made winning all the more critical. "With Gephardt, we win," said a White House official. "Without him, we probably lose." Bush won the trade vote by a comfortable 231-192. Still, the margin was close enough that Gephardt, had he gone against the administration, might have defeated Bush. At least the White House believes this (Gephardt doesn't). "There were enough swing votes he could have appealed to," insists a Bush adviser.

Despite Gephardt's pivotal position, the decision to court him was not easily reached. White House lobbyists regard Gephardt as an unflinching partisan given to demagoguery. Carla Hills, the special trade representative, feared Gephardt would string the administration along, then lead the charge against fast track authority. And Bush hadn't forgotten his run-ins with Gephardt. During the fight over cutting the capital gains tax rate in 1989, Gephardt declared that Bush was eager "to help out his wealthy friends." He accused Bush at one point of "circling the limousines" at the White House. When the capital gains tax cut passed the House (it died in the Senate), Bush told Republican Representative Bill Archer of Texas in a phone call: "I'm displeased with Gephardt, the way he made it so really kind of personal." Bush was "offended" by Gephardt's comments, an official says. "He doesn't mind the fight on policy, but the metaphors were personal."

Bush retaliated in March 1990 after Gephardt attacked his foreign policy as "adrift, without vision, without imagination . . . without a guiding light save precious public opinion polls." The White House seized on Gephardt's proposal of food aid to the Soviet Union. Bush assured reporters that Gephardt doesn't get "under my skin." His sarcastic remarks suggested otherwise. "We have no request for food aid to the Soviet Union," he said. "You just want to put it on a ship and send it over there? No, I don't think that's a particularly brilliant idea. But I don't want to knock the man. Maybe he'll come on a good idea one of these days." Reporters laughed. Of course, Bush later embraced the idea of food aid to the Soviets—without crediting or apologizing to Gephardt—after Moscow asked.

What changed Bush's mind about Gephardt? I think Bush began to see a bit of himself in Gephardt. They are actually quite alike, two Boy Scouts. "Ideologically they're not that far apart," says an official who knows both. Gephardt was an anti-abortion, pro-military Democratic moderate until moving left to accommodate the more liberal presidential primary electorate in 1988 and the House Democratic caucus now. Bush and Gephardt "have the capacity to perform in a balanced way under stress." They're pragmatic politicians with tight control of their egos. They're serious about policy but willing to be demagogic on occasion (recall Bush in the 1988 campaign). Their differences are socioeconomic—Bush is upper class, Gephardt lower middle—and partisan. "I have a lot of disagreements with what he's doing and I say it," says Gephardt. Anyway, Gephardt began to grow on Bush during the budget summit last year. Bush heard from nearly everyone, including chief of staff John Sununu and budget director Richard Dar-

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man, that Gephardt was helpful and fair in the talks. And when Bush consulted congressional leaders on the Persian Gulf, he found Gephardt respectful though opposed to the war.

Friendly contacts aren't the whole story. Political calculation plays a part. Bush and his aides have decided that Gephardt is the most important man in Congress. How come? Well, Speaker Foley prefers to stay above the fray in the House, even to the point of weakening committee chairmen. Normally chairmen rely on the Speaker to protect their bills on the floor from endless amendments. But Foley won't do it. "That's the key to Gephardt's power," says an official. "There's been a practical transfer of power from the Speaker and the committee chairmen to Gephardt and his special task forces and negotiating mechanisms. Gephardt reaches more widely than anyone in the House. He's the acting Speaker." In the Senate, Mitchell is no match. He doesn't have followers. Gephardt, strongly backed in the caucus, can muster votes. That's the White House view, and there's considerable truth in it.

On fast track, Bush started with the backing of Rostenkowski and a solid Ways and Means majority. But this didn't guarantee success on the floor because of Foley's laissez-faire approach. "That put Gephardt in the position to be the guy to broker the deal," says a Bush aide. And Gephardt had something to gain by supporting extension of fast track. He got the protectionist label in his 1988 presidential race and desperately wants to shed it. The trade vote was an opportunity. But Gephardt demanded concessions if he were to abandon his allies in organized labor, who opposed fast track, and back a U.S.-Mexico free trade pact and a new international trade agreement (GATT). He laid out what he wanted in a ten-page letter to Bush on March 27. He required assurance that Bush, in negotiating the treaties, would pay attention to larger concerns about human rights and the environment and to more technical ones such as worker rights, rules of origin, an escape clause, and labor mobility.

Before writing back, Bush invited Gephardt for a one-on-one discussion in the Oval Office on April 23. They were cordial, but there was no backslapping or jokes. "Gephardt is pleasant but formal, gracious but businesslike," says a White House official. "He gets right to the substance." Gephardt cited his worries about free trade with Mexico. Bush responded with promises to deal with every one. (He followed up with a letter, similar to one sent to Rostenkowski and Senator Lloyd Bentsen of Texas, that spelled out his assurances.) Gephardt gave Bush no commitment on how he'd vote. But once Gephardt had left the room, Darman, who'd sat in on the session, told Bush that Gephardt was all but certain to vote with the president.

The White House took no chances. On May 3 Bush was scheduled to speak at Cochran Gardens, a public housing project just outside Gephardt's St. Louis district. Bush aides had set up another event, a meeting with Hispanic business leaders in St. Louis to tout fast track and free trade. Fearing this might seem heavy-handed and anger Gephardt, the White House canceled the meeting. Gephardt says he told officials they need not call it off for his sake. "It didn't matter," he says. But the White House was so eager not to rile Gephardt that Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater called Deborah Johns, one of Gephardt's press secretaries, to coordinate how they'd respond on the cancellation.

The Bush-Gephardt détente faced one more hurdle. On May 12 Bush delivered a commencement address at Hampton University in Virginia. One line upset Gephardt: "Some of the opponents of free trade have resorted to slurs against our Mexican neighbors in the hopes of derailing fast track." Gephardt, who'd officially endorsed fast track by this time, saw a clip of the speech on the evening news, then read about it the next morning. "I thought it was an unneeded, unjustified shot at the labor groups," he says. On the House floor, he denounced Bush for preaching racial harmony but "practicing racial division." Bush, thrilled to have Gephardt on board, didn't risk a response. ●

JERUSALEM POSTCARD

EXODUS

By Richard Z. Chesnoff

As the Mengistu regime breathed its last, Jerusalem's government corridors buzzed with talk of frantic negotiations to evacuate Ethiopia's remaining 15,000 Jews before rebel forces reached Addis Ababa. In truth, the dealing—and heavy bribing—had gone on for months, much of it with decisive help from the Bush administration. By Friday morning, just forty-eight hours after Yitzhak Shamir gave the formal go-ahead, rumors swept Israel that its army and air force had begun a mammoth human airlift. By nightfall confirmation came from on high: Israel's usually silent Sabbath skies were busy with the roar of large planes flying to and from the south.

The sheer scope and speed of "Operation Solomon" dazzled. In a breathtaking thirty-four hours of forty sorties, waves of Israeli cargo, military, and passenger planes scooped up thousands of endangered Ethiopian Jews and ferried them from beleaguered Addis Ababa to the safety of Zion and the welcoming arms of Israel's Jews. The people who call themselves "Beta Israel" and whom other Ethiopians call "Falashas"—strangers—were now back among their own, returning high above the same Red Sea route that tradition says they took into exile 2,500 years ago.

It is the sort of moment that provokes acceptable

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pretension. "You are witnessing a page of history—the Jewish millennium," murmurs a misty-eyed Jewish Agency bureaucrat as an unmarked Boeing 707 lands at an Israeli military air strip in the early hours of Saturday. It is the first of the second wave of round-the-clock, human-cargo planes. Empty cartons of plastic water bottles and candy wrappers on the tarmac bear witness to the 4,500 who have already arrived and been whisked away by waiting buses to temporary homes and hotels from the Negev to Galilee.

Rescue time is short, and many of the planes have been stripped of seats and galleys to accommodate as many per flight as humanly possible. Ethiopian Jews are slight people; more than 1,200 were packed into the belly of a single jumbo jet. The newly arrived 707, which normally carries 180 passengers, is filled this flight with 490—a giant human ark. "Come in, take a real deep breath," urges one of the smiling crew. The immigrants had flown four hours huddled together on a communal carpet of thin foam rubber mattresses covered in black plastic. None had ever flown before. "They clutched each other at takeoff," says a young army reservist named Ofer, "then they clapped and sang throughout the flight like pilgrims."

A small army of welcomers waits on the tarmac. Among them: forty young Ethiopian Jews, some just months in Israel, but long enough to take on self-assured Sabra airs. They sport blue hats perched stylishly high atop carefully coiffed Afros, and Star of David badges identify them as *madrichim*—guides for the newcomers. Many watch nervously for their own families. "I have not seen my mother and father for a year," says 17-year-old Avraham Mahari. Will they be among the arrivals? "Only God knows," he says searching among the descending pilgrims.

These are people from another time: men and women with tired faces of carved, dignified beauty; shy children with bright eyes wide as tiny saucers. Most of the newcomers are clad in rough, white, homespun *shamma* cloaks. Many have infants strapped tightly to their backs.

Old and young, they climb quietly down from the plane with the overly cautious stride of people unfamiliar with stairways. There is no luggage. Most have carried nothing away but themselves. A handful maneuver small bags, or juggle the clay and straw utensil on which Ethiopians prepare their sour-tasting bread, *injarrah*. Many of the children are barefoot but carefully clutch plastic shoes in their hands. A boy named Isaac grasps two Hebrew books in his hands, which he received at the school in the Israeli Embassy compound where thousands sought refuge.

On the ground, several of the frailest stagger, then are gently helped along toward a long caravan of red buses by a burly Israeli trooper who carries a child with matchstick legs under his left arm. There are ambulances and incubators waiting. Six babies have been born in flight.

For the 18-year-old Israeli army recruits on duty, this scene is what they have been taught from childhood—the heart-sense of Israel's very being. The sight of 15,000 black Jews being embraced by 4 million white and brown Israelis is an eloquent response to the United Nation's resolution that Zionism is racism. It is also a reminder to a hostile Arab world that objects to Jewish immigration, whether in downtown Tel Aviv or on the West Bank, that the Jews are here to stay. Veterans on the tarmac pause to recall miracles past: Auschwitz survivors plucked from the sea by an underground Jewish army; secret airlifts that rescued entire Jewish communities from Yemen and Iraq; the overnight flight only months ago of Albania's tiny Jewish remnant.

"This may be the last time we will see an entire community airlifted to safety," says David Harman, who organized the Israeli school in Addis Ababa. But it is not the last dramatic flight home. Toward dawn, as more planes of Ethiopian Jews stream in from the south, another giant airliner taxis in from the north, this one filled with Soviet Jews, for whom there are already barely enough homes, jobs, and classrooms. The Falasha will have their own worries about the future. But they will be alive to do so. And they will have people with whom to share them.

RICHARD Z. CHESNOFF is senior correspondent for *U.S. News & World Report.*

America's first free war.

WAR PROFITEERS

By Jonathan Rauch

In March Senate Republicans held a small meeting to "pay tribute to those responsible for the overwhelming success" of Desert Storm. Thanks resounded for the president, the troops, the troops' families, the American people, Dick Cheney and Colin Powell, Norman Schwarzkopf, weapons, workers who build weapons, Secretary of State James Baker, Ronald Reagan, the defense budget, technology, the Israelis, coalition partners in the military campaign, the United Nations—for everybody, in fact, even for Democrats who supported the use of force.

Well, almost everybody. The fact that a number of countries—Japan and Germany, in particular—had pledged large sums to pay for Desert Storm could barely have been guessed from the Senate proceedings. About the closest anyone came to appreciation was Senator Don Nickles: "I also congratulate the president and Secretary Baker for persuading our allies to pick up the bulk of the cost, the majority of the cost. I

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think that is an enormous accomplishment, and I compliment them for it."

Rather embarrassingly, it now appears that the United States might earn a profit, loosely speaking, on the war. Foreign pledges come to $54.6 billion. The Bush administration says that the war will cost at least $60 billion, but outside analysts doubt it. The administration's figures assume, for instance, that all destroyed and damaged equipment will be replaced, which in fact it probably won't be and shouldn't be, given that the United States is in the midst of a defense build-down. The General Accounting Office says that the administration's cost estimate "is unsupported and appears high." Congressional analysts and the independent Defense Budget Project agree.

Whether the United States earned a "profit," of course, depends on how and what you count (aid to Kurds? debt forgiveness for Egypt?). But it's beyond a doubt that financially the United States has made out remarkably well, and that, contrary to the chorus of hostility in Congress and elsewhere, the Japanese and the Germans more than paid their share. In January the unofficial buzz was that the United States wanted the Saudis and Kuwaitis to pay about 60 percent of the war's costs, the Japanese 20 percent, and the Germans and Americans the rest. Well, of the $54.6 billion in pledges to the United States, 67 percent ($36.8 billion) comes from the Gulf states (mainly the Saudis and Kuwaitis), 20 percent ($10.7 billion) from the Japanese, and nearly all the rest ($6.6 billion) from the Germans. In other words, we got what we asked for, with one adjustment: the U.S. percentage may be zero.

So what were the complaints about? At first people griped because the response from Japan and Germany was slow and insufficient—which, at first, it was. By late January, though, it was clear that foreign pledges were in fact very big. That did not stop Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell from telling the nation on January 29: "Those allies who've prospered behind the shield of a common defense must contribute their fair share. They're not doing it yet. It's time they did."

By early March the war was over, and it was clear that foreign pledges might actually outstrip U.S. costs. Nonetheless, the protests continued: the allies weren't paying fast enough. On March 7 the House, complaining that (in the words of Representative Bob Carr) "the allies have not been quick to fulfill their commitments," passed a sense of Congress resolution admonishing them to pay up or else. Some acted as though the commitments hadn't even been made. Representative Mary Rose Oakar still didn't quite get it: "The United States provided the lion's share of the brave men and women in the armed forces, and our taxpayers essentially picked up the tab."

By late March it was clear that the money was coming through. Complaints about allied shirking began to die out. Or rather they shifted in emphasis. On April 8 House Armed Services Committee chairman Les Aspin issued a report complaining that the problem was "not so much with the aggregate amount pledged" but rather that "gathering pledges was like pulling teeth."

By mid-May the Germans were paid up. The Japanese were paid up or close, depending on how you count. (They counted yen and said they were paid up; currency shifts this spring put them a bit under the mark in dollars.) Kuwait and Saudi Arabia lag because of their cash crunch but are not expected to welsh. So now there's talk of earning a profit. But erstwhile complainers are not shouting hosannas. A sheepish silence is being observed.

All in all, this has been an impressively petty and grudging performance. "I think it's sort of a strange thing," says Alexis Cain of the Defense Budget Project, "when we keep setting new standards for what will satisfy us. First we say they're not doing enough, then that they're not doing it fast enough, then that they're not doing it cheerfully enough."

If anything there's even a case—as the opposition Social Democrats in Germany have pointed out—that we should return some of the profits. This ignores, of course, the fact that the United States risked lives, whereas others merely risked overdrafts. But that's still no reason for the ceaseless ally-bashing of the last few months. Acting as though we were annoyed by Japan's and Germany's billions feeds cynicism and isolationism at home, and bolsters anti-Americanism in Germany and Japan. Many Japanese are thoroughly irked at what they perceive to be American ingratitude for their (all told) $13 billion in Gulf-related aid. And they have a point. Maybe we should even stop playing the martyr long enough to say thank you.

JONATHAN RAUCH is a contributing editor of *National Journal.*

THE PRESS

HORSE JACUZZIS

By Scott Shuger

In Los Angeles, where the basic values are fame and real estate, any combination of the two is irresistible. I was surprised, then, when Joan Didion, a native Californian, took 10,000 words in *The New Yorker* last year to explain *The Los Angeles Times* and didn't use any of them to address "Hot Property," the column in the paper's Sunday real estate section that is devoted entirely to celebrity house deals. The paper gives the feature major play: since the early '80s it's been consuming twenty or so column inches at a pop. And for the last two years it has occupied the lead col-

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umn slot, forcing any of the paper's million and a half Sunday readers who want to learn more about their city's acute affordability crisis or about any of the other crushing housing problems facing them to look beyond it.

If you want a new perspective on America's housing struggle, "Hot Property" is the place to look. That's where you learn that Linda Evans had to move in order to be closer to her personal channeler. Or where you learn that the Sultan of Brunei had to abandon is plans to buy a 36,000-square-foot $18.5 million estate in Bel-Air because of high radon levels, and that "Hello Dolly" composer Jerry Herman sold his $3 million Sunset Strip home because he also owns three houses in Palm Beach and one in Connecticut, and "he felt it was too much of a strain at this time to keep them all."

Beneath headlines that transcend self-parody—"TV Sleuth Tracks Down New House," "From Big Screen to Bigger Ranch," "Batman's Girl Buys in the Hills" are among my favorites—"Hot Property" takes the uncritical public glorification of wealth to heights that would give pause to Robin Leach. "Los Angeles Laker Magic Johnson's Bel-Air home is on the market," we were recently informed, "and he's buying another, sources say, in the posh Beverly Hills Post Office development known as Beverly Park. The house he is buying is still under construction but will have six bedrooms in 13,000 square feet. The property, which is behind gates, also will have tennis *and* basketball courts." Other items come close to real estate porn: "Sylvester Stallone ... has purchased a home in the Beverly Hills area for $5.7 million.... He had leased the house for three years from billionaire financier Kirk Kerkorian.... The two-story Spanish-style home, with a pool, also has five bedrooms and five baths in about 8,400 square feet. The house is one of five owned by Stallone. He also has homes in Malibu, Kauai, Maryland, and Hidden Valley." The column went on to observe that one of Stallone's houses features "a horse Jacuzzi."

Then there are those scenarios that only Hollywood can adequately contrive: "Pop singer Janet Jackson, who signed a recording contract worth an estimated $32 million in March, has purchased the Malibu home of Gail Ann Hurd, producer of the sci-fi movies 'Aliens' and 'The Terminator.' Jackson paid the $4.5-million asking price.... The contemporary-style home was described by a real estate source as 'very white, with a museum feel to it, built so it would present art well.' " And occasionally, the owners find it hard to restrain the full flush of their aesthetic pride: "Deborah Harmon, who co-starred in the movie 'Used Cars' with Kurt Russell and the ABC sitcom 'Just the 10 of Us,' has remodeled the Sherman Oaks home that she has owned for 12 years.... 'It was changed from a California ranch-style to a Nantucket, New England, look.... I redid the pool from a 50s, Fort Lauderdale motel look with a fake-looking turquoise bottom, to a pond with a gray bottom, which reminds me of Tahiti ... I gave it your basic Beverly Hills face lift.' "

Ruth Ryon, who has written "Hot Property" since its inception, recently told me the basic rules for getting into the column: the property should be associated with a celebrity or a business big shot, or be a "big bucks house." As an afterthought, she added that historical significance could count too. As far as I can tell from reading the column over the years, this usually means that a miniseries was once filmed at the place or that Jerry Lewis's ex-wife lives there. Ryon concedes that sometimes the celebrities she writes about are only "mini-celebrities." This is confirmed by her column's frequent coverage of the residential adventures of Pia Zadora, and any remaining doubt is dispelled by such headlines as " 'Love Boat' Doc Finds a Place in the Sun" and "Jane Withers Builds Valley Warehouse."

In every other real estate column in the country, the news is still gloomy. Sellers pay for every scrap of attention they can get for the house they are struggling to sell. But if you are rich, at least semi-famous, and lucky enough to live in LA, then your city's sole newspaper will be only too glad to spread the word for free. Even, it seems, when you're dead: "Liberace's home in the Hollywood Hills from 1959 to 1979 has been listed at $3,495,000," "Hot Property" recently divulged. "The gated, 12,000-square-foot mansion has five bedrooms, two servants' quarters, 10 baths, a sewing room, a theater/music studio, billiard/game room, gym, two kitchens, two formal dining rooms, and many balconies overlooking the city-to-ocean views.... Dana Brockaway of Prudential Rodeo Realty has the listing." "You might already know that Cheryl Ladd lives next door, and Dolly Parton lives just down the street," states another item, "but did you know that June Davies of June Scott & Associates, Beverly Hills, had the listing?" In the same spirit, the column frequently trumpets developers, designers, and interior decorators, not to mention upcoming TV appearances and movies. Even the little editorial squibs that accompany the column are shameless plugs: "Proper use of the right tape measure, says CooperTools, manufacturer of Lufkin tape measures, can save you time and money."

In the fall of 1989, while working on a magazine piece about homelessness, I came across the definitive "Hot Property" item: "Music countdown king Casey Kasem and his wife, actress Jean Kasem, will host their Lawn Circus today, by invitation only, from noon to 4 p.m. to support 'The Housing Now! March on Washington' on Saturday. The Kasems are holding the fundraiser in the Holmby Hills home they purchased in July for $6.8 million."

SCOTT SHUGER, a consultant for ABC News and a *Washington Monthly* contributing editor, lives in Los Angeles.

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The sad decline of American publishing.

ROUGH TRADE

By Jacob Weisberg

Once upon a time writers wrote and editors edited. Today most writers still write, but most editors don't do much editing if they can help it. Those who perform the actual task now have a separate title to accompany their lowly place in the professional pecking order. They're called "working editors," as opposed to the other kind, who may be more numerous. These toiling scriveners still do what their title implies: work on manuscripts. Editors like Ann Close at Knopf or Jonathan Galassi at Farrar, Straus and Giroux spend their days and nights toiling with pen and typewriter, engaging in detailed correspondence and dialogue with authors. They do much what Maxwell Perkins did for F. Scott Fitzgerald and Thomas Wolfe. Their careers are like those of college professors with a vocation for teaching. Though their talents are deeply appreciated by a few, at the bigger houses they usually get turned down for promotion because of their low profiles. A working editor may earn $50,000, which isn't much in Manhattan. He or she eats lunch at his or her desk.

The only visible reward for this difficult, anonymous work is usually a heartfelt thanks from an author on his acknowledgments page. For this reason, most in the trade aspire to the more glamorous position of "acquiring editor," the one who goes prospecting for new works to publish. Acquiring editors, like Joni Evans of Turtle Bay Books, the imprint she was awarded by Random House, might be compared to record company talent scouts or rain-making partners at law firms, who bring in clients and leave the day work to weary associates. They hire assistants or free-lancers to do what textual emendation is necessary. They have little time for such busywork themselves, spending their days on the phone with agents, bidding in auctions for ghost-assisted projects by non-writing celebrities like Muhammad Ali and Marlon Brando, and dealing with powerful marketing and promotion departments. Their hunt for new material involves a lot of frantic schmoozing and gossiping, which may lead them to "brand-name" authors ripe for poaching. An acquiring editor earns upward of $100,000 a year. At lunch he or she can be found in the Grill Room at the Four Seasons.

Acquiring editors are not judged by the quality of the books they acquire. Often it doesn't even seem to matter if their books make money. Instead they are measured by the number and dollar amount of the contracts they sign. "This is a business where everybody breaks out the champagne when they spend millions of dollars on a book," says Lorraine Shanley, former editorial director of HarperCollins. "Go figure."

Editors today, like authors, consider themselves free agents. Ambitious ones roam from house to house, changing jobs so quickly they're often not around to answer for their purchases when the bills come due several years later. Aaron Asher paid a million dollars of Grove Weidenfeld's money for Milan Kundera's new novel *Immorality* before returning to HarperCollins, where he worked previously. He won't be around to answer for his speculation if the book earns back only half its advance. For editors who do stay in one place, an overpayment of a few hundred thousand is often dwarfed by the acquisition of something even bigger. "The basic difference between editors who are coming in today and those who came in twenty-five years ago is that we had some serious ideas about the books we wanted to do," says Ted Solotaroff, a retired editor who worked for many years at Harper & Row. "There was much more scope for an editor to pursue his passions and his interests. Today he is working on consumer books, rather than reader books."

Consider Random House's 1951 fall catalog, which was typical for the firm and the decade. It comprised a discriminating twenty books: fiction by William Faulkner, Truman Capote, Nancy Mitford, John O'Hara, and Par Lagerkvist, as well as the complete novels of Jane Austen, and several minor writers long forgotten. There's also a volume about New York by Lloyd Morris, a book about Asia by James Michener, *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams*, and *The American Vest Pocket Dictionary*.

The firm's current spring list contains close to sixty books. There are some excellent writers—Paul Theroux, Anita Brookner, Norman Mailer, Ann Beattie—but they jostle against a dozen works of genre fiction: mysteries, spy thrillers, bodice-rippers, and historical epics. Seven works of serious nonfiction—a history of the U.S. Navy, Clark Clifford's ghostwritten memoirs, a travel book about Africa by Peter Matthiessen, among others—are submerged by countless how-to books on barbecue, mas-

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sage, ballooning, gourmet cooking, money management, and psychology, as well as coffee-table specials on fly-fishing, Winchester rifles, and country life. Guiltily buried in the back of the catalog, though prominently displayed in chain bookstores, are *The Seventh Day Diet* and *Can We Talk?*, an as-told-to memoir by Joan Rivers.

Of course, even high-minded publishers want to make money, and the best houses have always been willing to put out schlock that sells. But in the mid-century heyday of American publishing, a firm like Random House would publish a bit of flimflam to underwrite its worthier efforts. Except at a few independent-minded houses, of which Farrar Straus is the most prominent example, the situation is now reversed: the literature is an afterthought to the schlock, a garnishing of literary prestige to soothe the conscience and placate the ghosts. This shift is clear not so much from the number of good books that get published—which remains prodigious—as from the way the content of those books are treated. Today even the serious books that Random House produces are, like those of its interchangeable competitors, filled with ungainly and ungrammatical sentences, errors of spelling, typography, and fact. They are badly organized, long-winded, and repetitive to the point of unreadability. Like most books from the major publishing houses these days, they are edited haphazardly, if at all.

Take one of the more promising nonfiction entries in the Random House catalog, Ken Auletta's *When the Good Times Stopped*, billed as an account of the harm done to American broadcasting by the recent wave of corporate takeovers. The book's editor is the firm's editorial director, Jason Epstein, inventor of the quality trade paperback, one of the founders of *The New York Review of Books*, and the original guiding force behind the Library of America. Epstein is regarded by many as the Edward R. Murrow of publishing, but like all successful acquiring editors these days, he has far too much on his plate to spend time editing any one work. In working for a branch of a vast conglomerate owned by mogul S. I. Newhouse, Epstein has to spend much more time thinking about how to make money than he did when the firm was owned by its founders, Bennett Cerf and Donald Klopfer.

As a consequence, Auletta's finished tome, a 990-page typescript with changes scrawled in the margins, was on the desks of serial-rights selectors at the major magazines and book clubs only days after he finished writing it in March. To edit it properly (Auletta is not, let us say, a natural writer) would have meant delaying it a year. This would have displeased everyone—the accounting department, the exhausted author, the busy editor—and served only those hapless souls who will end up trying to read the book. But then, most people who actually want to *read* about the subject will content themselves with what are likely to be well-edited excerpts in *The New York Times Magazine* and *Esquire*.

Editors at these magazines will edit Auletta because it's their job. They are judged by their colleagues and rewarded by their employers primarily on the basis of their ability to edit prose. Thus they will do their best to make the Auletta excerpts concise, informative, and convincing. Thirty years ago the same was true in book publishing, but no longer. Though most book editors can recognize these attributes, they have little incentive to work heroically recasting manuscripts for weeks or months. "Editorial lapses are not heavily penalized in the marketplace, therefore people let them go," says Starling Lawrence, an editor at W. W. Norton, one of the last independent houses. "The more commercial the book, the less perfection is required in such matters."

Often the failure to hack down unwieldy manuscripts is the result of a rush to publication. "The publisher will have a hole in his list because other authors have not delivered on time," says Charlotte Sheedy, a literary agent. "They will encourage the author to speed it up. Some authors buckle under the pressure. They often regret it later."

Anyone who reads new books feels the effects of these trends. At the most basic level, books are shoddier than ever before. Kenneth Adelman's 1989 book on arms control, *The Great Universal Embrace*, reprints page 23 where page 123 should be. Five crucial lines are dropped in Lou Cannon's just-published *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*. In *Possession*, A. S. Byatt's Booker Prize-winning novel, the protagonist's name is spelled two different ways. I found two spelling errors before I had even finished the acknowledgments of E. J. Dionne's *Why Americans Hate Politics*. Most of these books are published by Simon and Schuster, but similar gaffes can be found in those of most other commercial houses, where careful copy editing is becoming a lost art.

For lack of editing, books have also gotten far too long. Editors have largely abandoned the task of finding the slim book in the unwieldy manuscript, of discovering the sculpture in the raw stone. There's not even commercial pressure to shorten books. The Book-of-the-Month-Club and chains like B. Dalton believe, in the words of one buyer, that "serious books should be weighty." Among recent examples of door-stop unreadability: *William Faulkner: American Writer* by Frederick R. Karl (Grove Weidenfeld, 1,200 pages); *The Power Game: How Washington Really Works* by Hedrick Smith (Random House, 703 pages); *KGB: The Inside Story* by Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky (HarperCollins, 776 pages); *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* by Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith (Clarkson Potter, 934 pages); and *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money & Power* by Daniel Yergin (Simon and Schuster), bringing up the rear with a brisk 911 pages. Jack Germond and Jules Witcover's book about the important 1980 presidential campaign, *Blue Smoke and Mirrors*, was a mere 337 pages. Their book about the less momentous 1984 election, *Wake Us When It's Over*, was 567 pages. Rarely has a book been more appropriately titled.

Writers are loath to talk on the record about how poorly edited their books are because it reflects badly on them, and upon editors who are potential purchas-

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ers of future books. With an offer of anonymity, however, their frustration pours forth. One first-time author I spoke to is a reporter who was posted in the Soviet Union for a number of years. When she submitted her manuscript, the product of four years of work, her editor did nothing except advise her to change it from first person to third person. The author made the change, and several reviewers pointed it out as a major flaw of the book, which sold poorly and disappeared quickly from the shelves. "He never read it thoroughly and never line-edited it," the writer says of her editor. "He was way too busy and overworked. There wasn't a single mark on the manuscript."

Many authors, of course, are far from innocent victims of the publishing process. It's not hard to learn which editors have a reputation for making books better, but writers often are more tempted by big bucks than by the prospect of extensive rewriting, which will have little impact on their sales. "Authors can't have it both ways," says Nicholas Lemann, a nonfiction writer. "If they're going to choose based on top dollar, they forfeit their right to complain about the quality of the publishing." Many authors, in fact, long for an editor like Alice Mayhew or Michael Korda of Simon and Schuster, who are renowned not for their editing but for their ability to conjure best sellers out of their hats.

For an author, working with Simon and Schuster is often a Faustian bargain. It almost certainly means more money, strong backing in advertising and promotion, a big first printing, and thus a better chance at best-sellerdom. Since its takeover by Gulf + Western (now Paramount Communications) in 1975, S&S has put itself in the forefront of bidding wars, winning the lion's share of the million-dollar advance books of recent years, including Ronald Reagan's autobiography and various novels by Jackie Collins and Jack Higgins. But going with S&S also means working with editors who for the most part don't pay much attention to what's in the books they print. Unlike Random House, Simon and Schuster has never had a distinguished reputation as a publisher of literature. Recently, however, it seems to be making a push to live up to the assertion of Dan Green, the former head of the trade division, who told *The Wall Street Journal* in 1984 that "there is no level below which we will not go."

This gleeful bottom-feeding is evident in both Simon and Schuster's fiction and nonfiction lists. When Philip Roth abandoned his longtime publisher Farrar, Straus and Giroux for a $1.8 million, three-book contract with Simon and Schuster, he got a taste of the approach with his novel *Deception*. The work was promoted with a cheesecake cover depicting a man's hand grasping a woman's naked midsection. "We wanted to give this one commercial appeal," John McKeown, the head of Simon and Schuster's consumer publishing division, told *The New York Times*. "We wanted to get across the sexiness of the book and link it to *Portnoy's Complaint*." The book failed to do terribly well, not least because flesh is not what turns on Roth's customary readership.

The novel that made the biggest stir this year was Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*. Editors wanted the novel because of its prurient appeal, which they judged worth a $300,000 advance and played up in their spring catalog. When details of the novel's sordid contents first leaked out in *Time*, they hoped to ride out the storm and profit from the furor. Weeks before copies of the novel were due to be shipped to bookstores, however, they were reportedly overruled by Martin Davis, the chairman of Paramount, who determined that the bad publicity was harming the firm's reputation. S&S chairman Richard Snyder then claimed he had only just learned about the novel's contents and blamed the decision to publish it on his subordinates. (The book was picked up by Sonny Mehta, the new chief of Knopf, who penciled in a few minor changes and issued it as a Vintage paperback, putting only a small dent in the firm's vaunted literary reputation.)

Simon and Schuster's other notorious judgment call this spring was Kitty Kelley's *Nancy Reagan: The Unauthorized Biography*. Editors cannot have failed to notice the book's thin documentation, unwarranted assertions, and innuendos, like the famous reference to Nancy's "luncheon" with Frank Sinatra. But having paid out a $3.5 million advance, Simon and Schuster hyped exactly the salacious bits an honest editor would have questioned by treating them like atomic secrets. Having thus guaranteed sales in the millions, Kelley's editor, Alice Mayhew, refused to take a position on whether the contents of the book were factual. "That is not my role," she told *Newsweek*. Contractually, the author and not the editor is responsible for factual accuracy. This practice is not so much to save money (university presses have manuscripts peer-reviewed for a few hundred dollars) as it is to protect books from being robbed of their sensationalism for the sake of accuracy.

Mayhew went beyond disclaiming responsibility for the Nancy Reagan fiasco. She shamed her author publicly by publishing in the same month Cannon's painstaking account of the Reagan presidency, which contradicts Kelley on dozens of points, such as Nancy's influence on arms control and the firing of various Cabinet members. Cannon's years of careful research were in turn undermined by the publicity boom that greeted Kelley's revelations. He says he considered a lawsuit because he was promised that his book and Kelley's would not be published simultaneously, but author and publisher are now resolving their differences. No one at Simon and Schuster seems bothered by the contradictions. According to Snyder, "To publish is to disseminate. Our aim is to present both sides."

This is not an isolated case. Mayhew, who made her reputation with Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein's *All the President's Men* and has since cornered the market for blockbuster Washington books, is also the editor of two new books that relate contradictory accounts of the U.S. invasion of Panama: Woodward's *The Commanders* and Kevin Buckley's *Panama: The Whole Story*.

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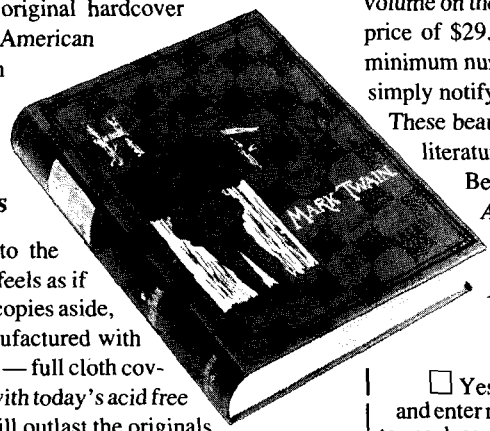

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For years university libraries have played competitive games of literary investment, paying top dollar for living writers' letters and manuscripts. Both sides have benefitted. Universities, gambling on up-and-coming talent, built their libraries' reputations for scholarly excellence; writers were glad to have the extra pocket cash. Now, however, spiraling prices, tighter budgets, and computer technology are threatening to kill the once prosperous modern manuscript trade.

Before the Second World War, manuscript collectors cared only about the papers of literary giants long since dead. But as English departments proliferated after the war, university research libraries had to keep pace to attract scholars and doctoral students. With scholarly interest in contemporary literature growing, libraries began to collect the papers of writers who were still alive.

By the late 1950s, even competition for living writers' papers had become fierce. Washington University's Olin Library responded by pioneering the policy of collecting unknown writers who faculty thought might become famous one day—a game of literary futures. These writers' papers were much cheaper than those of the big names, and they promised to increase in value as the young authors found critical acclaim. Washington University's prescient investments included the papers of Stanley Elkin, Howard Nemerov, and William Gass. (Gass hadn't even published his first book yet.) Other universities caught on. Texas bought Anne Sexton's papers early in her career; Columbia invested in William S. Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, and Jack Kerouac.

Speculation, of course, has had its pitfalls. Reputations fluctuate with the intellectual currents; someone headed for greatness one day may be washed up the next. "That's why most institutions prefer to deal with dead authors," explains Sandra Taylor at Indiana University's Lilly Library. "We've taken a chance on some writers who haven't retained their reputations as much as we'd have liked."

There's another reason that buying modern manuscripts has become treacherous: the prices have skyrocketed. Dollar figures for manuscript sales are generally kept secret, but figures from public sales are revealing. In 1988 Sotheby's auctioned the manuscripts and proofs of Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet* for $66,000—a record for the public sale of a single work. For a whole archive, book dealer Bart Auerbach says that a reasonably well-known author can command between six and seven figures. According to New York book dealer Glenn Horowitz, Norman Mailer talked loosely of selling his archive a couple of years ago but couldn't find anyone who would listen at the price he cited.

As costs have escalated and university budgets have shrunk, libraries have become more conservative in their literary investments. "The feeling now among collectors is that they want to buy classics," says Ralph Sipper, who runs Joseph the Provider, a California dealership. "If I have a Faulkner or Hemingway manuscript, I can still name my price. But they're a little more reluctant to speculate on a writer."

Some universities have retreated from the manuscript marketplace; others have responded in creative ways. The University of Wyoming and Boston University have become notorious for soliciting unwary writers simply to give their papers away, seducing hundreds of potential donors with promises of special treatment such as a wing in a new library. "By throwing a very wide net, they pull in about 3 or 4 percent of people who have little or no idea of what their papers are worth," says one bookseller. "They give them no clue that they have a very viable alternative of selling their papers. It's a slick, academic con job." He adds that they prey especially upon young, naive writers and the sick and elderly. For Howard Gotleib, the curator of the twentieth-century archive at BU, such work is not painless. "My body is covered with scars from begging," he says. Gotleib has been known to engage in what another bookseller calls "ambulance-chasing," scouring obituaries for names of accomplished writers and then hitting up their aggrieved widows or children for the spoils. As for the writers he allegedly cons, he says, "If they're not aware of [their papers' value], they can't be very bright." People who have given their papers to BU include Alistair Cooke, Margaret Drabble, David Halberstam, and Dan Rather.

BU and other libraries also allow writers to "deposit" their papers rather than give or sell them. Under this arrangement, the library gets physical possession of the materials, the writer legal possession. And it circumvents the tax law: in 1969 Congress made it illegal to deduct from one's taxes donations of "self-generated" works, which include a writer's manuscripts. But when the writer dies and bequeaths his papers, his heirs can formally donate them to the library where they've been deposited—and get a tax break. Everyone is happy except the writer, who is dead.

If monetary considerations don't kill the manuscript trade, technology may. As word processors overrun the literary terrain, manuscripts are harder to come by. Computer disks are easily reproduced, and if writers modify extensively on them, they fail to illuminate the creative process. "If all you have is the final computer disk, it cuts the value to zilch," Bart Auerbach says. With developments in computer hardware, moreover, tomorrow's libraries may lack the equipment to read today's disks.

Still, libraries are trying. Even if a writer uses a word processor, says Rodney Dennis of Harvard's Houghton Library, "we try to get successive printouts" of a story. Software is even beginning to take on icon status for fetishistic collectors. Libraries provide glass-encased exhibits of the little black disks of their more prominent acquisitions, replete with explanatory blurbs. Washington University, for example, put Elkin's disks on display, and Yale recently exhibited William F. Buckley's floppy. Yet no matter how lavish the presentation, plastic computer disks are less enticing than a handwritten page with sentences crossed out and comments scrawled in the margins. As Washington University curator Holly Hall says, "One can't fondle a floppy disk the way one can fondle a letter or a manuscript." After years of hot pursuit, the libraries may finally be forced into abstinence.

DAVID GREENBERG

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Woodward accepts the Pentagon version of what happened in the failed coup attempt in October 1989: that Defense Department officials didn't back it because they didn't believe it had a chance to succeed. Buckley, by contrast, argues that General Maxwell Thurman thought the proposed coup was part of a plot masterminded by Noriega to provoke the use of military force by the United States, and that he badly botched an opportunity to help depose Noriega once it happened. Woodward calls the SOUTHCOM estimate of 202 civilian dead in the American invasion "[not] far off the mark." Buckley says few even in the Pentagon believe the 202 number, and credits estimates of 1,000 deaths.

Mayhew herself declined to comment, but an editor who has worked closely with her says she believes the reason Mayhew never worried is that she never read the Buckley book. According to the source, Mayhew has no chance to read many of the thirty to forty books per year that bear her imprimatur. To spare hurt feelings, she mentioned only one other author: the deceased physicist Heinz Pagels, whose book *The Dreams of Reason: The Computer and the Rise of the Sciences of Complexity* she is certain Mayhew never read.

Although Mayhew is reported to work on problems of structure with big shots, she farms out most of the nitty-gritty work to three minions. When an author gets a letter and a marked-up manuscript back from Mayhew, he may or may not be aware that the marginalia and suggestions are not hers. One first-time author who signed with Mayhew says that he met with her only once in the five years he worked on the book and that he found it extremely difficult to reach her on the phone. But when he finally submitted a completed manuscript, he received it back with editing he thought was superb. He was ready to acknowledge having misjudged her when he discovered that the comments represented as hers were those of a free-lance editor retained for the project.

When TNR economics editor Robert Kuttner did his first book, *Revolt of the Haves*, with Mayhew in 1979, he says that he found their relationship cordial but that his manuscript was scarcely touched. "It suffered from not being edited," Kuttner says. "It is fifty pages too long, and has stuff in it that is too technical. At the time I naively took it as a vote of confidence." "If you're not Bob Woodward or Kitty Kelley, then you run a great risk of being forgotten altogether," says one fellow editor.

According to one author who has worked with Mayhew, "Your status with Alice has to do with how big an advance you get from her. She's not interested in books under $70,000." Those who are ignored may be better off. Sally Bedell Smith spent three years on a biography of CBS founder William Paley, and had written about two-thirds of it, when Mayhew pushed her to complete it in six months for inclusion in a thin autumn list. Though Smith says she wanted the book finished and doesn't think it suffered, the haste shows. An editing process that ordinarily takes nine months was completed in less than three. One former editor calls the 782-page biography "hideously rushed." George Anders, a *Wall Street Journal* reporter, contracted with Mayhew to write a book about Kohlberg Kravis & Roberts and the leveraged-buyout business. Author and editor disagreed about organization and timing. When Mayhew found out that Anders was going to be beaten by another quickie book on the subject, she insisted that he rush his out. Rather than meet her terms, Anders repaid his advance and took his project to Basic Books. This kind of treatment has won Mayhew the nickname "Malice Mayhem."

Retired *Washington Post* columnist Philip Geyelin contracted with Mayhew to write a book on King Hussein. Mayhew recently canceled it, telling Geyelin's agent, Ron Goldfarb, that Hussein was no longer important enough after the Gulf war, and since the book was three months late he would have to repay his $100,000 advance. According to one Simon and Schuster insider, however, Mayhew killed the book because Snyder believed it would lose money. "It's a big factory," says Cannon. "What you have at work is the same kind of judgment that goes into making Sony Trinitrons."

A better comparison for American publishing might be the Detroit automakers, circa 1973. Unlike Sony, Simon and Schuster shows every sign of being more interested in how many units it sells than in how well the appliances work. The publishing giants are technologically backward and allergic to innovation. As in Maxwell Perkins's day, most editors mark up text longhand, rather than by computer, which would save months of production time and prevent many of the errors that creep in when keypunch operators retype what authors have already written and edited on personal computers. The anachronism is emblematic of an industry that values the appearance of tradition over traditional scrupulousness.

What it shows is that in many ways publishers are *not* market-driven. Rather, they lazily assume that the market for their products will always exist and see no reason to waste money on bettering them. And their decision may be semi-rational. There's no Japanese competition to force American publishers to beef up their quality control. Pressure to produce better books ought to come from consumers. But the problem is that many of the people who buy books are exactly that—consumers, and not readers. They buy books for status, not elevation. The Pollock biography will probably sell more copies as a coffee-table ornament than as a diverting, instructive read. Like a pre-energy crisis Chevy Impala, it looks like a lot of car for the money.

Many editors are trying to improve editorial standards, but in a post-literate era it's an uphill struggle. A story is told about Bob Loomis, an editor at Random House, who spent two days a week for thirteen months laboring over the mammoth, unreadable manuscript of John Toland's *The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire* and fashioned it into a best seller. When it came time to negotiate the contract for Toland's next book, a biography of Hitler, Random House's offer reflected the cost of Loomis's time. Random House was outbid by Doubleday, which didn't bother with editing. The book became a best seller anyway. ●

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Nicaragua's elite soap opera.

AS THE WORLD TURNS

By Arturo Cruz Jr. and Consuelo Cruz Sequeira

Be it in a partisan tale told to a child by an ancient veteran or in the equally partisan meditations of the country's great protagonists, the history of Nicaragua is rendered as a labyrinthine account of the horrors inflicted on a virtuous majority by a fractious and immoral minority. Simple, perhaps atavistic, this is a powerful story. And, unfortunately, it contains a good deal of truth.

So Nicaraguans hope against hope for moments like that day in April 1990 when Doña Violeta Chamorro ascended to the presidency dressed in white—a white as pure as the immaculate conception. Meant to mark the beginning of a new history, her triumph, however, became merely the beginning of another labyrinthine year. One by one, as so often before in Nicaragua's history, the powerful—from the Ortegas to the Chamorros—adjusted to a changing reality, only to retain as much as possible of the old. The politics of democracy became the politics of pacts.

The swiftest adjustment was made by "the General of all the Nicaraguan Armies," who, shortly after Chamorro's victory, addressed his 3,000 officers, anxiously crammed in the Olaf Palme convention center awaiting instructions from their *jefe* on how to behave in the new Nicaragua. General Humberto Ortega, the Sandinista leader who kept his position as chief of the Nicaraguan armed forces after the election, talked for hours. He argued that socialism was no longer a viable option; he lauded Antonio Lacayo, the son-in-law of the president-elect, and thus recognized the power behind the throne; and he dared criticize Cuba, even though he knew that the leaders of the Frente Sandinista still saw Fidel, the man they called "El Viejo," as a prophet.

Now Humberto asked his officers, "How many of you have studied in Cuba?" Almost all raised their hands. "And how many of you would like to live in Cuba?" The officers sat motionless, hands resting in their laps. Colonel Xavier Pichardo—the chief of the air force—listened quietly until the end, when the 3,000 men emerged from the hall and spilled like an olive-green river into the hallways. Immediately Pichardo sensed their perplexity. True enough, the officers admitted, no one wanted to live in Cuba; but like family secrets, certain things should remain unspoken. Besides, what would happen to them?

Led into such political temptation, Pichardo began to behave like a rooster. He hinted that the Frente Sandinista should forge an alliance not with Chamorro's son-in-law, but with Virgilio Godoy, the independent-minded vice president-elect. Humberto, however, shrewdly detected the potential rebellion in his colonel and summoned him to his office. The colonel obeyed, but was far from docile. "Prepare the helicopters for combat," he ordered his men before leaving to see Humberto, "and put the base at Punta Huete on alert."

By the time Pichardo reached Humberto's office, Humberto had already been informed about the colonel's preparations for combat. "What is wrong with you, Pichardo?" Humberto asked menacingly, confronting him with the evidence. The petty chief shrank before the caudillo, and laid all blame on his second-in-command, Lieutenant Colonel Oscar Cortés. "All right," Humberto replied, "if you are in fact innocent, then you will call your units, and tell them to disarm." Even as Pichardo called, Humberto dispatched one of his reliable colonels to take over Pichardo's bases. And a few days later, with the crisis controlled, Humberto brought the rebel before the Council of Colonels, which promptly discharged him for insubordination. And, in one of those moves characteristic of caudillos, Humberto spared the second-in-command, thus retaining an officer who, from then on, was both grateful to and fearful of his general.

Humberto had survived not only his brother Daniel's electoral defeat but also the first coup attempt by his own people. What's more, he managed to take away from Comandante Tomás Borge the internal security apparatus, which he merged with his army. Then he demobilized thousands of his own soldiers and officers; and in order to retain his four stars, he resigned, with profound relief, from the Frente Sandinista. In his view, the party was in a deep crisis, its 41 percent of the votes notwithstanding. A party without access to the public budget, Humberto reasoned, was just one more in a multiplicity of parties; and a party with a troubled ideology was likely to oscillate between paralysis and chaos. Also, there was the disgraceful spectacle of the piñata: the discrediting scramble among the Sandinista

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leaders immediately after their electoral defeat—for vehicles, houses, factories, industries, and farms that fell from within the ruptured state.

Humberto survived by calculating his moves precisely. Now it was time to support Chamorro, which he knew would increase the chance of aid from the Western democracies. He had reduced his army but still needed to feed and dress his remaining 28,000 soldiers, all of whom had grown accustomed to fine boots and meals. (To this day, Humberto's army absorbs 16 percent of the national budget, an exorbitant share even for prerevolutionary Nicaragua. In 1977 Somoza had a joint army and police force of 7,000 men, with three Sherman tanks and machine guns that had to be cooled down with splashes of water.)

Humberto's lucidity in the face of change contrasted with the disorientation of the other militants. They denounced politics and began to look for jobs—a new and trying experience for many—in order to pay for the essentials they had once received from the Sandinista state. The comandantes too responded as best they could. Luis Carrión Cruz announced he would study public policy at Harvard. Jaime Wheelock, the father of the agrarian reform, became the largest landowner in 170 years of national history. Tomás Borge remained in the fold, patiently betting on a resurgence of ideological faith. And Daniel Ortega took control of the syndicate of urban laborers and public employees, which he would launch against the Chamorro government during the first months of its administration.

In the meantime, Doña Violeta surrounded herself with relatives and turned over de facto power to her son-in-law, Lacayo, who entered into a close alliance with his brother-in-law, former contra leader Alfredo César. Almost spontaneously, the two relatives decided on a division of labor that reflected the ingrained habits of their political culture and of their individual talents and personalities. Lacayo, who had once studied to be a Jesuit, is earnest, industrious, frugal. A manic centralizer, he demands total obedience from his ministers and won't talk to his own vice ministers unless they request a formal appointment. As soon as he won power, Lacayo carefully selected for his Cabinet able technocrats: decent men who lacked public stature.

César was ideally suited to take control of the National Assembly, which in times of transition turns into a realm of high Machiavellian politics. César is the nation's finest power technician. Somehow he manages to work without exerting himself and always looks refreshed, as if he has just bathed in the cologne of success. César recoils not from ill-defined agreements but from clearly specified obligations; and, like Talleyrand, he would rather not commit word to paper, not even his own signature. César's team is one of craftsmen of mischief: they coat sinecures, hand-outs, and bribes in the idiom of compassion even as they shove competitors into oblivion and discard exhausted helpers.

From the start Lacayo and César identified Virgilio Godoy, their own vice president, as their "scorpion": an intimate who comes to be seen as a venomous creature strategically positioned on the collar of one's shirt. César, assigned the task of neutralizing the scorpion, turned to the gifted politico Fernando Zelay, whom everyone knows as "The Devil." The Devil, in turn, went to the Sandinistas in the National Assembly and made a pact to undermine the constitution in order to disempower the vice president. By the terms of the 1987 constitution, when the president is temporarily absent from the country, he or she is replaced by the vice president. So the Devil dreamed up the idea of redefining "temporary" to mean a minimum of thirty days, and as a result, whenever President Chamorro travels abroad for a few weeks, power is either not deposited in anyone or is left in the hands of her designated successor, likely to be a family member.

In this atmosphere of deal-making and rule-breaking, Daniel Ortega, the electoral loser, could not be expected simply to accept exclusion. If his brother Humberto could ensure himself a place at the banquet table, why not he? Daniel began to agitate for inclusion through his labor union. Between May and August Daniel's strikers sabotaged the government's bid to restore some sanity to the economy. The government was continuing the effort by the Frente Sandinista between 1988 and 1989 to fight inflation through a sharp cut in public spending and a rise in imports. But now Daniel managed to convey his message to César that he was to be taken seriously. At the end of October his syndicate and the government signed a pact in which they agreed to reduce the budget deficit "gradually"—meaning never.

At the end of October the ruling family prepared to shake another scorpion off its collar: Francisco Mayorga, the president of the Central Bank. Mayorga had erred as early as the presidential campaign, when in his bid for a high profile he even imitated Doña Violeta: he too dressed all in white; and he too invoked God at the drop of a hat. Once in his post, Mayorga refused to admit that he was simply an employee of the señores; that he had no right to aspire to prominence in the public theater, because even though he had earned a doctorate from Yale, he had been born not an aristocrat from Granada but a "respectable middle-classer" from León.

Mayorga was removed; and a few days afterward there was a wave of disturbances. This time it was the turn of the demobilized contra soldiers and the anti-Sandinista mayors to vent their discontent. By then the magnitude of the contra demobilization was clear: instead of the expected 7,000, more than 22,000 rebel soldiers had become civilians. Humberto became their champion, arguing that their demands for land must be met. "Franklyn," a prominent contra comandante, soon felt cozier with General Ortega than with President Chamorro's relatives. And Humberto, having forged this bond, now insisted that his demobbed troops also be given land. And, guided by his uncanny political acumen, he settled demobilized contras and Sandinistas in the same zone, each camp on either side of a road. Humberto was determined to become the

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maximum leader of a community of warriors.

Meanwhile the government also began to woo the demobilized contras, by naming two of their former comandantes as vice ministers. And the old contra chief Colonel Enrique Bermudez returned home to build a power base among the still-rankled contras in the north. Because his effort met with significant success, shortly before Easter he was shot in the head at close range. The deed was carried out with scientific precision. Not even the investigative authorities would admit to possession of the bullet, and the political cost of his death was almost nil. After all, Bermudez was not only the son of a humble woman who had earned her living pressing suits, he was also a former Somocista who dared obstruct the crafting of a magnificent structure of pacts by the elite.

Eating iguana and retreating to the beach are two Easter traditions in Nicaragua. At every traffic light, especially now that unemployment has reached 40 percent, the poor sell their reptilian merchandise. They approach the stopped air-conditioned vehicles and display the iguana close to the windows. So there he was, Comandante Borge, still not quite used to having to stop at traffic lights like an ordinary citizen, suddenly eye-to-eye with a frightened iguana. A homicidal rage overtook him. He gasped that he was being insulted, taunted, humiliated now that he was down. Out he jumped, ready to disfigure the innocent salesman. Fortunately, the comandante was restrained by his own bodyguards.

This spring, Lacayo too grew edgy. He knew he had to impose order on a country that, though naturally rich, simply did not produce. And he had to do so before meeting with the international creditors and potential donors who would decide if Nicaragua deserved their help. By then Nicaragua was $350 million in arrears with the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, a debt it had to clear before it could borrow afresh. So just before Easter, Lacayo and his economic team, in front of their *presidenta*, announced a program based on fiscal discipline and a massive devaluation of the gold peso aimed at export promotion and internal price stability. The conference broke all rules of form: Lacayo and his team talked for more than three hours while Doña Violeta marveled placidly at the good tidings promised by her son-in-law, smiling as if she were witnessing his miracles already, gesturing proudly at the Cabinet when he spoke of projected increases in exports.

Lacayo's rhetoric was as populist as Daniel's, who, now that he was seated at the banquet table, allowed his unions to agitate in public for a 500 percent wage increase, but then called them in private and told them to sign a new pact with the government in which they agreed to a mere 300 percent. The truce was even put to paper, so that Lacayo might take it to Washington as proof of progress in the government's effort to satisfy the international financial institutions. But when Lacayo arrived in Washington, he was told that he would have to wait for a decision to be made at the Paris meeting of the World Bank consultative group, toward the end of May.

Lacayo returned to Nicaragua hopeful. At the end of Easter week, at San Juan del Sur, the resort of the elite—with its caravans of Toyota land-cruisers and satellite dishes imploring the night skies—the powerful reassured themselves: the money, they kept saying, was coming in May. Also at the end of Easter week, Comandante Wheelock, no longer content to be a mere landowner, began to agitate through his rural union against the restitution of expropriated farms, until he was brought into the pact. The pact is essential to government and Sandinista allies alike: like the traditional señores and caudillos, they believe it will bring stability when all it really brings is a perpetuation of self-indulgence.

Now a certain gravity has descended upon the country. The older generation complains about how before the Revolution five families used to sit at the banquet table, with plenty of morsels left for the people, whereas now ten families sit at the table—and few morsels fall for the rest. The younger generation, like the Sandinista rank-and-file, denounces a revolution that began in idealism and ended in the old politics of pacts and thievery. Urbanites say that in Nicaragua nothing works, not even "imports" that are such successes elsewhere. They tell you about a famous circus that came to Nicaragua with African lions and elephants but lost its huge tent to a tropical storm. And what about the Blue Angels airplane that took a nose-dive into Lake Managua? Anything would fail in this God-forsaken country, they swear, where a feather will sink to the bottom of a pond and lead will float like a feather.

In the countryside the mood is even graver. Disillusioned peons along the banks of the San Juan river await their "esteemed *patrón*"; the self-same autocratic *patrón* who so often mistreated them. In a village near the fortress of El Castillo, a state worker lauds the last Somoza—"a fair man who lived and let live." The politicos and chiefs, for their part, still assume that the outside world is like their family barrio: intimate, nosy, and concerned about their fate. And that Nicaragua is an intrinsically desirable object, much as it was when English pirates looted its cities. Doña Violeta herself cannot tell the difference between the absentee American senator and the page seated in his place to spare her the embarrassment of a half-empty Congress.

Like the señores and caudillos of the past, today's politicos and chiefs fail to draw a distinction between national conciliation and pacts. The former would represent an exercise in principled opposition, and an attempt to build real bonds of trust, even sympathy; the latter is a temporary and fearful activity, the pact's participants held in check by mutual sharing, but also sorely tempted to betray one another as the booty disappears. The funds from abroad will surely come, of course, and the booty has not yet disappeared. But Nicaragua is a "democratic" country now. And the rest of society is biding its time until the next elections, when it will surely take its revenge. ●

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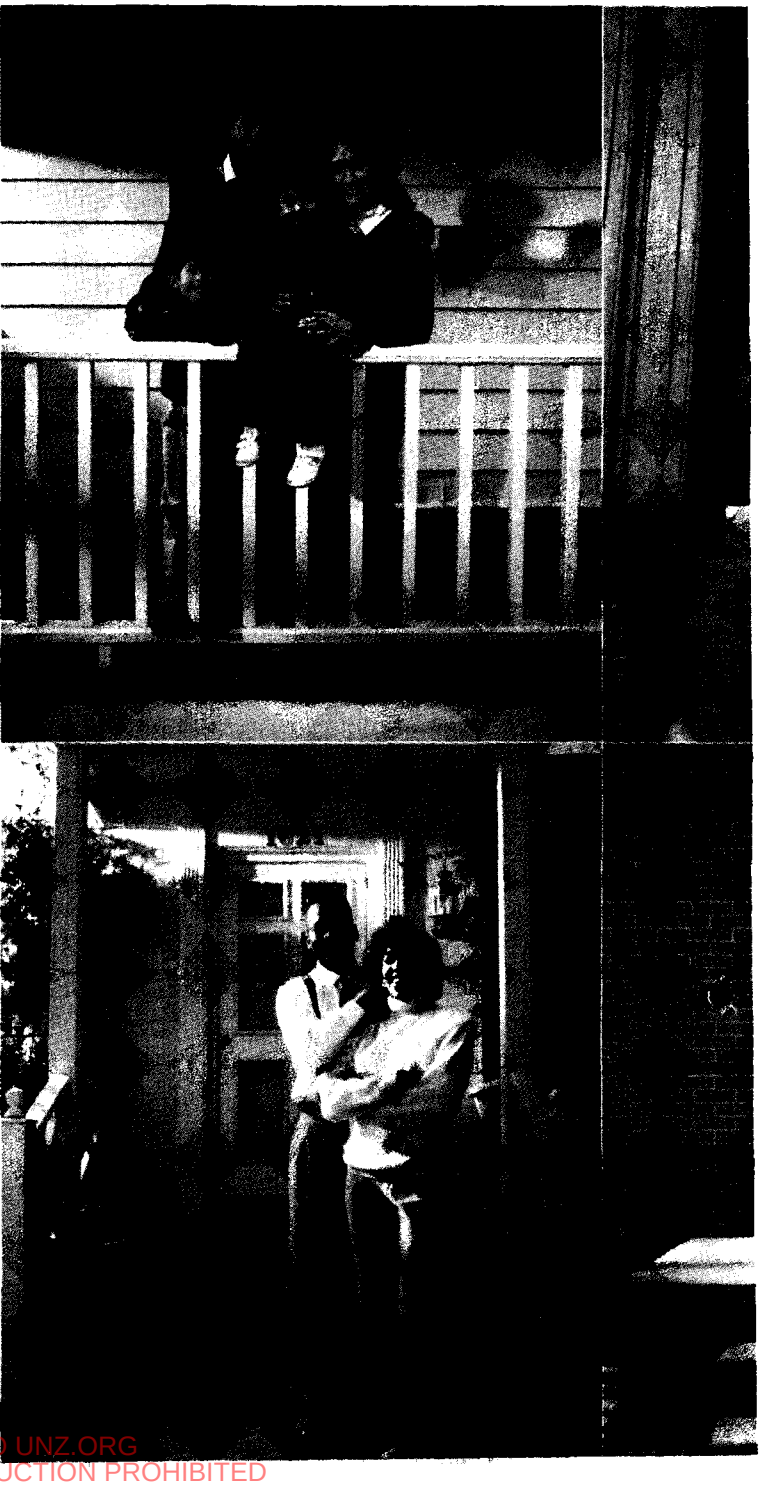

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Types

Two kinds of film have long been prominent in Hollywood. First, there's the "pitched" film, the picture based on a clever idea—usually an odd juxtaposition—that overwhelms a producer when it's pitched to him. (An Eskimo inherits a Miami Beach hotel.) The novelty of the idea sweeps away, at least momentarily, the difficulties of making a whole picture about it.

Second, there's the proven formula, sometimes fancily called the genre film. One such is the male-profession film, which is festooned with waiting and worrying women. The profession might be test piloting or auto racing; lately it's often been police work. About this kind of picture, there are no difficulties in working out a whole screenplay—hundreds of models are on hand. All the current filmmakers really need to do is update the references and diction.

An example of the first: **City Slickers** (Columbia). The basic idea, which knocked somebody out when it was presented, is comic contrast: take three 1990s urban men, smart-mouthed yet worrying Jules Feiffer types, and plunk them down in a stark elemental situation far from a city. These three, each of whom is undergoing some sort of crisis in his life, elect to go off together for two weeks at a dude ranch. But this ranch is different: the dudes, under supervision, take part in a cattle drive, escorting a herd from New Mexico to Colorado.

It's good for some laughs, especially since one of the three is the adroit Billy Crystal and the trail boss is the gaunt and leathern Jack Palance, who despises city people. The laughs are both usual (tenderfoot riders with tender bottoms) and unusual: at one point along the trail, Crystal and friend ride out of a wood debating how to tape TV programs with a VCR.

But the screenwriters, Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel, have a lot of trouble getting a whole film out of what is really only a premise. They cobble up such devices as putting a lone young woman among the guests, and they contrive to have Crystal and friends bereft of guidance so that they must bring in the herd on their own, and, alas, more in the same vein of strain. The basic gimmick for this picture was a shiny lure for which a producer leaped too soon.

A sturdy example of Type Two is **Backdraft** (Universal). The male profession this time is firefighting, a choice that has some freshness. Certainly firemen have been very much less used than cops. But the reason for this soon becomes clear in Gregory Widen's screenplay. Fire is an impersonal opponent. Widen had to inject a criminal element, arson, to be tracked by a fire department investigator (Robert De Niro), in order to give the film some sort of human opposition.

Basically it's about the fireman's vocation. In Chicago, a father dies in the line of duty and leaves a legacy of firefighting heroism to his two small sons. When the sons grow up, they (fill in the next word yourself) quarrel. The big blaze at the end, bigger than all the blazes up to then, serves to (you've got it) reunite the two brothers. This takes more than two hours.

The two principal women, a wife and a former girlfriend returning to the fold, are hung on the male story like ornaments. It's sad to see two talented actresses, Rebecca de Mornay and Jennifer Jason Leigh, wasted in puppet parts.

The principal men, besides De Niro, are Kurt Russell and William Baldwin as the brothers, who do the ritual roles with proper respect for tradition. The prize part is Donald Sutherland's—a gentle, whimsical pyromaniac, now imprisoned. In a scene mildly reminiscent of the FBI's use of an imprisoned killer in *The Silence of the Lambs*, De Niro visits Sutherland in jail to get hints about the arsonist he's trying to track down. Sutherland has a high old time with all the winning nuttiness at his command.

Nothing need be said about the direction; but a salute to the special effects people—dozens of them, some of whom are specified as pyrotechnicians. What does a pyrotechnician do, I wonder, between fire-department films? (Spy-picture explosions, I guess.)

The most interesting film-world interview I've read in a long time is the one with Mike Nichols in the May-June issue of *Film Comment*, interesting not only because Gavin Smith asked intelligent questions but because, with Smith's piloting, Nichols drew on his triple career—as performer, theater director, and film director.

At one point Smith asks Nichols what, in his view, a director contributes to a film. Nichols replies that, among other things, the director has to pick the style:

FILMS WORTH SEEING

An Angel at My Table. *A New Zealand woman, Jane Campion, filmed the autobiography of another New Zealand woman, the writer Janet Frame. The childhood section is best, but all of it is direct, open, humane. (Reviewed 6/3/91)* **The Comfort of Strangers.** *An Eros-Thanatos story, set in Venice. Excellently acted and directed. Harold Pinter's screenplay, from Ian McEwan's novel, is imperfect but gripping. (4/29/91)* **Truly, Madly, Deeply.** *Juliet Stevenson and others are first-rate in this somewhat slushy screenplay about a bereaved woman in London today. (5/27/91)* **Truth or Dare.** *A slickly made documentary about Madonna that tells you more about her than you wanted to know. But telling too much is itself part of the story. (6/10/91)* —**SK**

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I figured out very early in my life what I think style is. I thought of it watching a play when I was in college. It seemed to me then, as it does now, that style is beginning something in the manner which will make it necessary for the things that happen later to happen.

This strikes me as something more than a rough-and-ready, hands-on definition.

Inevitably there's a discussion of the difference between directing plays and films. Says Nichols:

It took me a while to understand how different movies are from plays. Directing a play is all about where everybody is and what everybody's doing. And if you've got everybody in the right place, doing the right things, then the play can happen.

But a movie is not about that. A movie is a dream. And so any moment in a movie is about whom this particular moment is happening to, whose experience any given moment is. And in trying to isolate whose experience the moments are, and what is really happening that isn't only what they're saying in the words—from those concerns you choose where the camera is.

The distinctions that he makes between plays and films are, as of course he knows, incomplete, but they are integral. Film, for all its Renoir-style "held" shots, doesn't often deal as well as the theater with people coming together in one place to clarify their lives. The theater, for all its Chekhovian delicacy, doesn't often or easily situate us within one person and one person's view of possibilities. Again Nichols provides something more than a working definition.

Apology. Two weeks ago, reviewing Jane Campion's new film, I mistakenly omitted the indefinite article in the title. The correct title: *An Angel at My Table.* ●

In DOD We Trust

By Eliot A. Cohen

The Commanders by Bob Woodward

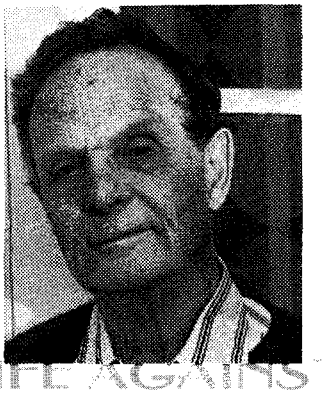
(Simon and Schuster, 398 pp., $24.95)

One's first instinct on picking up Bob Woodward's book is to mistrust it, even to dismiss it. The prepublication hype was unwarranted by the news value of the book. Its most widely reported revelation—that in the late fall and early winter of 1990 General Colin Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, favored a strategy of containing Iraq rather than attacking it—is not much of a story: American generals often show less eagerness to launch wars than their critics suspect. To learn that there was a variety of opinion in the high councils of power about a matter of such consequence is neither good news nor bad news, it is no news.

Nor does the breathless style of *The Commanders* inspire confidence. When the prose is not stenographic, it is often purple, as in the description of a squadron of 120 special forces soldiers having "enough firepower to make any battle seem like a non-nuclear version of World War III." Woodward's high school teachers appear not to have dinned into his head the notion that a paragraph should normally contain at least three sentences; in his precious attempt to lend excitement to the mundane, Woodward resorts constantly to the one sentence paragraph, even when reporting such unsurprising developments as the unanimous Senate confirmation of Dick Cheney as secretary of defense. And obviously the second part of *The Commanders*, which deals with the American buildup in Saudi Arabia up to the launching of Operation Desert Storm on January 16, 1991, was written in haste. It lacks even the frail structure of the first part, which covers the period from early 1989 through Operation Just Cause, the invasion of Panama in December of that year.

Aside from its sloppiness on military details (Woodward reports that the Army had sixteen divisions in March 1989, when it actually had eighteen), the book has more serious methodological flaws. Above all, there is Woodward's insistence on putting quotation marks around utterances that were not taped or recorded verbatim. He invokes a privilege for his own research that will not find favor in the eyes of historians, or even in the eyes of rigorous journalists: he assures us that his direct quotations "come from at least one participant who specifically recalled or took notes on what was said." He asserts that his interviews sometimes took

NORMAN O. BROWN



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place hours or days after the events described, but this is a hopeless procedure for recovering precise wording.

Quotation marks belong around verbatim quotations, and nothing else: not around what people think, or wish, that they, or someone else, said two hours ago, much less two days ago. Naturally there are no footnotes in the book, no documentary record that researchers can use to verify Woodward's facts. *The Commanders* makes a claim to lie somewhere between journalism and history, implying that it tells more of the why and the how of current events than the accounts found in newspapers. It is, in truth, merely a work of journalism in book form, a stringing together of investigative reports; and it is a work in which the author has taken liberties that probably would not last very long on the front page of a first-rate newspaper.

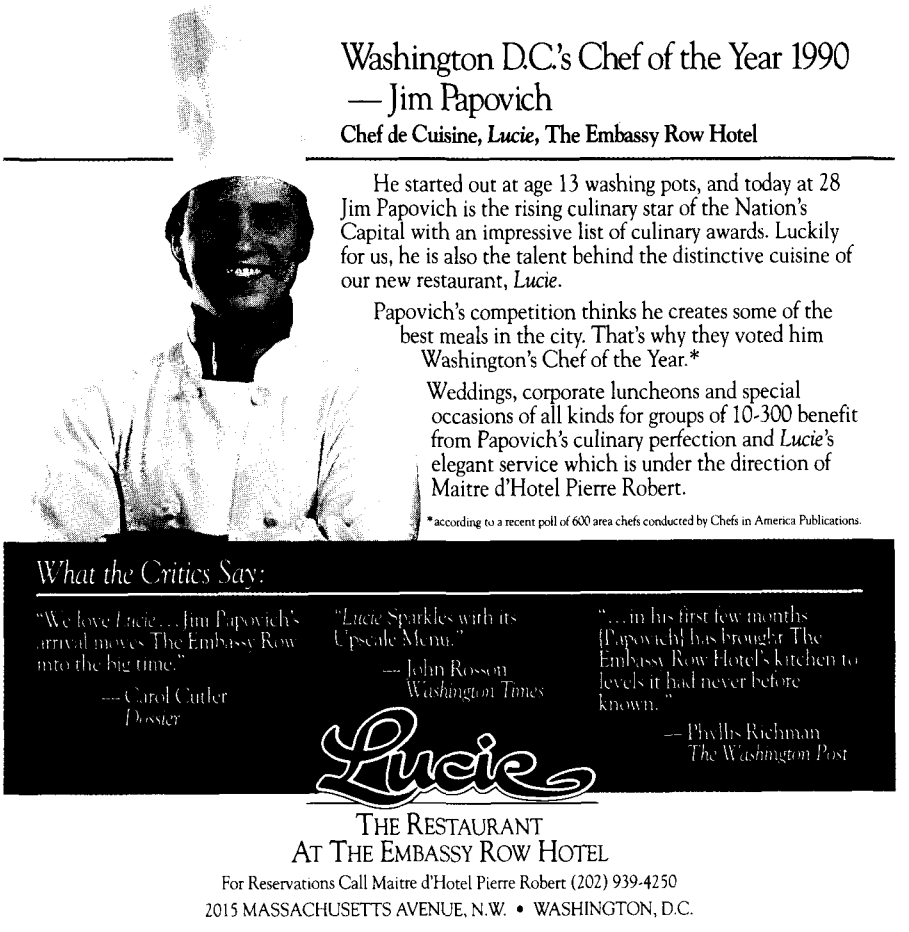
Worse, this book lacks any analytical or conceptual framework. If Woodward has views about the war, about the military, about how the Pentagon is run, they are concealed; but more likely they simply do not exist. Unlike real history, *The Commanders* tells nothing of how matters came to be, what long-term pressures operated on men in high places; and unlike descriptive social science, it does not tell us how institutions work. The contrast, say, with a book like Lou Cannon's study of the Reagan administration, a work of thoughtful journalism, is striking.

Woodward began his project two years ago, as a book on the Pentagon. He quickly discarded that in favor of the two great stories that unfolded before him, Just Cause and Desert Storm. It is just as well, because his specialty is not portraying the workings of large organizations. He excels, rather, at recording the doings and (perhaps) the thoughts of a few men at the pinnacle of government. And even in this case, the perspective is limited primarily to the Pentagon. James Baker, Brent Scowcroft, and even George Bush are chiefly heard as offstage voices in a drama that centers on Colin Powell and Dick Cheney.

With all of its limitations, is the book believable, and if so, is it important? The answer to the first question is a qualified yes. Woodward *is* a capable journalist. Nobody mentioned in the book has so far stepped forward to deny any major episode in it; and such indirect evidence of veracity, though it may have no standing in a court of law, does carry weight in the world of Washington talk. But the most convincing evidence of Woodward's trustworthiness, at least for me, is that whenever I have been able to check Woodward's account it has been confirmed, both the facts presented and the atmosphere depicted. Even officials who loathe the man and disparage the book have admitted to me its essential accuracy. Where Woodward's book misses the mark, it is because of incompleteness, as when a protagonist has refused to talk.

In one way, though, Woodward is *too* complete. His reporting is indiscriminate, and it includes sensitive information on intelligence gathering operations, even code words for programs that deserve to remain secret. These tidbits are added to enhance the impression of verisimilitude, not because they are necessary to the tale. Still, this gratuitous breach of security is not solely, or even chiefly, Woodward's fault. The blame must rest on mid-level and high-level government officials. By talking to Woodward as they did and when they did, many public servants broke faith with their superiors and, just as important, with their oaths of secrecy. Even when they "merely" revealed the administration's inner counsels, they undermined the principles of confidentiality on which statesmen must rely. One of the dramas recounted in the book is the firing of General Michael Dugan for allegedly revealing secrets in his conversations with journalists; but Dugan gave away nothing like what scores of anonymous leakers have passed to Woodward. Washington hypocrisy being what it is, however, it is doubtful that any of them will pay for it.

Woodward's account, then, is roughly right. And it is also important: with some effort, and with due regard for the uncertain accuracy of the material assembled, use can be made of this book. Its value lies not in its revelations, but in the raw material it provides for students of the Bush administration and how it went to war. It offers a window onto the decision-making processes of a presidency that may not leave much of a paper trail for historians. Because the president and his inner circle make their moves after informal discussions, and because they seem to have an aversion to the orderly recording of deliberations and conclusions, this may be as good a record of these events as we will get. Memoirs are notoriously self-serving, and the leading figures of the administration may not be the sort to keep full diaries. The record of contemporary conversations with a skilled journalist—and Woodward has the gift of putting his subjects at their ease—will not satisfy historians hungering for stenographic or taped records of internal policy debate, but they may have little choice.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Above all, *The Commanders* sheds light on the personalities of several leading political figures (Powell and Cheney mainly) and has much to tell us about contemporary American civil-military relations. Because of Woodward's reportorial techniques and his limited purview, however, the book must be handled gingerly. The insights it offers are like a focused strobe light in a large, darkened room: the detail is sharp, but the resulting view is partial and disjointed, lacking context, texture, and color. It is a book worth reading, but carefully.

Begin by considering who has spoken to Woodward and why. One group, clearly, is the aides of important personages—such as the chief of public affairs at the Pentagon, Pete Williams. Their primary motivation may be assumed to be protecting their bosses and incidentally themselves, often by providing what is known in the intelligence business as "chicken feed," gossipy tidbits of little real worth. Thus Woodward records (probably on Williams's authority) advice that Williams received from David Addington, Cheney's office gatekeeper. Addington "told Williams to make sure he arrived at the Pentagon in the Cheney motorcade. You've got to be seen—this is important in Washington." And important it may be to those enthralled by the art of courtier politics in the antechambers of Cabinet secretaries. To most of us, of course, it is petty stuff.

A second group of sources consists of retired general officers, second echelon Defense Department civilians and military people, and high officials in agencies (such as the State Department) that are peripheral to the book. The most important member of this group is obviously Admiral William Crowe, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff until shortly before the invasion of Panama. The motives of such sources are several: settling old scores, chiefly, but also establishing one's own importance, and ensuring that none of one's major deeds is recorded in an unfavorable light. The thought attributed to Crowe early in the book that "Powell had a tendency to read people and then tell them in a very general and circumspect way what he thought they wanted to hear" is an observation of the first kind—a swipe repaid, perhaps, by the observation attributed to Powell that the Joint Staff under Crowe was a "think tank" (hardly a compliment in military circles) rather than an "action staff." This skirmish suggests the way in which Woodward profitably played adversaries off against one another to elicit information from each.

There are, finally, the two main players, Powell and Cheney, both of whom appear to have talked quite a bit with Woodward. They had the most to lose from such conversations, and they suffer in the book. Perhaps each was lured into chatting with the famous reporter when his objective was still an institutional study of the Pentagon, and before the drama of the two wars took over. Still, if they thought that they could "spin" Woodward, they made a real mistake—the kind of mistake that countless victims of Mike Wallace make, but one that these old Washington hands should have known to avoid.

The cautious reader of *The Commanders* can accept, at least tentatively, two kinds of observation as true. One is the distinctive nugget of factual assertion, often dropped without much to suggest its significance. An example is the revelation that Crowe, as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, set up a special line of communications to his Soviet counterpart, Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, without authorization from his civilian superiors. This was a blatant violation of civilian control by the country's senior military officer, and it tells us something about senior military attitudes toward their civilian superiors in the late 1980s, but it appears in a casual aside.

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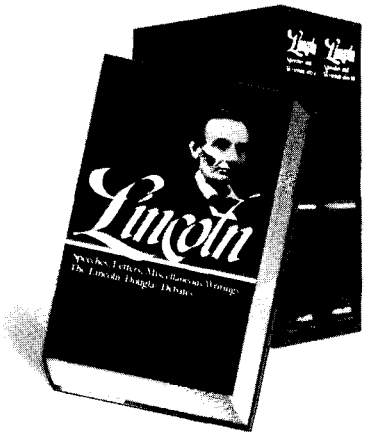

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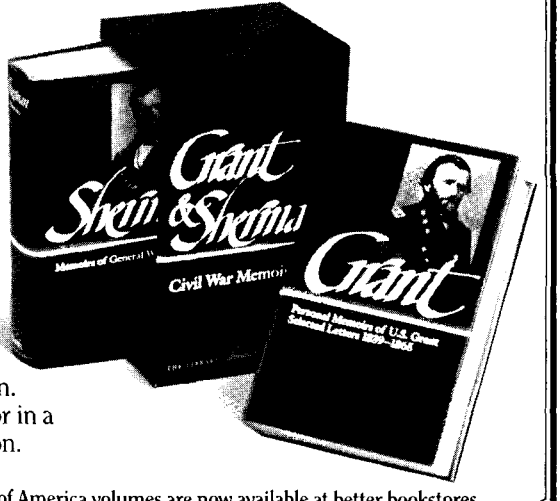

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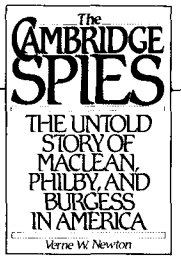

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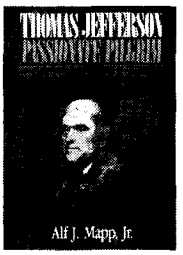

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emerges when a series of anecdotes forms a pattern. An example is the pervasive mistrust not only of the Air Force but of air power itself that seems to have shaped the strategic views of both Powell and Cheney. "Cheney already knew enough to be wary of the Air Force" when the book begins; and during the Philippines coup crisis of late November 1989, "Powell had an Army officer's natural distrust of air power. The big bombs always promised great achievement, but he had seen them fail too often—in Vietnam for example. But he kept those thoughts to himself." Early in the Iraq crisis, "Cheney and Powell made it clear that they were not at all comfortable with air power only" when the two men briefed the president at Camp David. Powell asked "What the fuck is the Air Force doing now?" when he heard that Secretary of the Air Force Don Rice had used military transportation to go to a football game at Notre Dame. Powell was furious that "the predominance of air power was the overriding theme, a kind of one-service, Victory-Through-Airpower approach" in Air Force Chief of Staff Dugan's fatal interview with journalists on a trip to Saudi Arabia.

In such a case one can test a mosaic of mutually supporting, but not fully reliable, observations against the public record. The public words and actions of the two men reflect the views that Woodward ascribes to them: Powell's public dismissal of an air strategy for war with Iraq as "one dimensional" and wishful thinking, for example, or Cheney's firing of Dugan for, among other things, the prescient assertion that an aerial pounding of the Iraqi army would mean that the ground forces could walk into Kuwait rather than struggle yard by yard, mile by mile.

Woodward writes about personalities, but his portraits are in fact more interesting for what they suggest about policies and institutions. The dominant figure in the book is Powell. (Woodward spares the reader the usual patter about the black general who speaks Yiddish.) The Powell who emerges is only slightly different from the public man, but it's worth noting the differences. His distance from (and even misgivings about) the president is something of a surprise. At first they had "no bond of loyalty, and as Powell knew, personal alliances were everything to Bush." The thought ascribed to Powell when the president made a commitment not to let Saddam's invasion of Kuwait stand ("it was almost as if the president had six-shooters in both hands and . . . was blazing away") is typical. It is also striking that Powell comes off as touchy about his image and his prerogatives: he regarded the Dugan interview not simply as an indiscretion, but "as a public shot across his bow." In public he is composed and relaxed, but in private Powell appears as a man who explodes in anger, and then recovers quickly. He gives the impression of a big man—bigger, maybe, than most of those around him. He faithfully executes a war policy that he initially disagreed with, as is his duty; he regularly calls a former aide whose parents are ill; he worries about the human costs of battle.

Powell is finally, and unabashedly, a political man. He tells students at the National War College that he spends much of his time "sensing [the] political environment. People sometimes say, well, Powell, he's a political general anyway. The fact of the matter is there isn't a general in Washington who isn't political, not if he's going to be successful, because that's the nature of our system." He is shown dominating even the public relations of the decision to intervene on behalf of Corazon Aquino against an attempted coup, and he appears slightly resentful when not called upon to give political advice to the president.

Powell's background—more than a decade of high-level Washington jobs—made him good at this kind of work. Still, his participation without qualm in politics also reflects changes in the American senior officer corps, and in the position of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. These changes are worth pondering, and perhaps worrying about. Woodward reports that when Cheney offered Powell the job of chairman, he laid out the general's five qualifications:

> (1) you know the building; (2) you know the White House; (3) you have punched the proper tickets in the Army and have the credentials; (4) you know arms control . . . ; (5) I know you, and worked well with you when I was in the House leadership.

Of these qualifications, only one might be considered "military"—and even that is described as "punching a ticket," which is to military expertise what "getting a diploma" is to education. The point here has nothing to do with Powell's real military abilities, but what Cheney wanted in a chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

As portrayed by Woodward, Cheney's persona also does not vary much from the public image: cold, judicious, intelligent, mean. His finest moment came at the outset of the Iraq crisis, when he confronted Powell and insisted that the military provide the president with options to reverse the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. He also shone in his insistence on review-

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ing in detail the operational plans for both Just Cause and Desert Storm. One useful service of *The Commanders* might be to put to rest the notion that both operations were handled by the military acting only on broad guidance from the civilian authorities. Cheney even seems to have gone so far as to invite Secretary of State Baker to review the bombing targets for the air campaign against Iraq just before the operation began. The only change reported by Woodward (emanating from the president, in fact) was to remove triumphal arches and statues of Saddam from the list of targets—a pity, since those targets would have contributed to the psychological aims of the campaign.

Cheney emerges in Woodward's book as a man who understands the need for close civilian review of military operations, and it is a need that the military history of democratic nations bears out. But he also shows a less attractive side. According to Woodward, he steadfastly opposed asking Congress for authorization to use force against Iraq. This is disdain, verging on contempt, for the legislative branch, and it violates political sense and perhaps even constitutional propriety. After all, Desert Storm was neither an instance of self-defense nor an operation that demanded swift action concealed until the last moment, as in Panama. This was a war of choice, of wise choice, but nonetheless a war launched deliberately and in cold blood. It is disturbing to think that the man who is in effect the deputy commander in chief believes that the president may risk the lives of thousands of American citizens under such conditions without giving their elected representatives some say in the matter.

Another flaw in Cheney's outlook and approach surfaced in three confrontations with senior military commanders. Almost immediately after arriving at his post, he publicly rebuked Air Force Chief of Staff Larry Welch for "freelancing" in talking with Congress about alternative purchases of long-range missiles. Cheney did so without waiting to hear, or even asking for, Welch's own account (the general had secured the approval of Deputy Secretary of Defense William Taft IV and national security adviser Scowcroft for his discussions), and without notifying anyone in advance. It was an undeserved public humiliation; and when Representative Les Aspin told Cheney as much, the secretary of defense is reported to have said, "with a knowing half smile, 'It was useful to do that.' "

Shortly after arriving in the Pentagon, moreover, Cheney dismissed Frederick Woerner, the general in charge of Southcom, the military command with jurisdiction over Central and South America. The firing was legitimate: Woerner was opposed to the use of armed force against Noriega, and the administration believed that he stood in the way of such measures. But when Woerner is reported to have said, "After thirty-four years of service I believe I'm entitled to an explanation," Cheney merely replied briskly, "Time for a change," and declared that it was a presidential decision. And, as in the Welch episode, Cheney did not bother to hear Dugan's explanation of his indiscreet statements on a plane to and from Saudi Arabia. Instead Cheney summoned and dismissed him, speaking from a handwritten bill of particulars (which seems to have been passed to Woodward) that now looks inadequate, and even faintly comical. (Among other things, Dugan was dressed down for seeming to approve a violation of the presidential order on assassination, this a few months before American planes went after Saddam's residences and command bunkers.)

One might conclude from this nothing more than that Cheney is a bad boss to displease, particularly if you wear a uniform—were it not for still another episode. When Cheney felt that Powell was failing to provide military options for the president following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, he began looking, naturally and appropriately, for other sources

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of advice. He sent his military assistants, including a junior admiral and an Air Force colonel, in search of other options—thereby angering Powell, who was determined to be the sole source of military advice to the civilian leadership, and who promptly bawled out Cheney's chief military aide. Cheney did not do the logical thing, which would have been to summon the Joint Chiefs (who are, by statute, his military advisers) and let them know collectively and individually of his needs and wishes. One can only speculate about why, but perhaps it has to do with a fundamental lack of rapport between the civilian chief and his military subordinates.

Following his public rebuke, Welch is said to have remarked: "I've been shot at by professionals and I'm still here. So being shot at by an amateur is not likely to cause me any pain." This not-so-veiled reference to his service in Vietnam (and, by implication, to Cheney's draft-deferred status during that conflict) suggests a latent tension between senior civilian and military officials in the Pentagon that may last some time. By and large, the senior generals and admirals served in Vietnam and brought home its scars. With notable exceptions, their civilian contemporaries, now their superiors, did not. In this case, the combination of Cheney's rough ways with senior officers and their lingering distrust of his record means that there is little of the easy communication and thorough understanding between statesmen and soldiers that are so desirable in the Department of Defense.

The foreshortened view created by Woodward's focus on the Pentagon detracts attention from the most important actor in these dramas, George Bush. *The Commanders* has been read as an indictment of the man who did not heed the counsels of caution concerning Kuwait. But just the reverse is true: in a distorted but vivid way, the book shows that it was Bush who understood the terrible simplicity of the issue brought before the world by Saddam's aggression against Kuwait. It required no small act of courage for him to insist that the invasion was intolerable and must be reversed, by force of arms if necessary. Despite his incoherent presentation of the issues at stake, despite the chaotic informality of the decision to go to war, despite the evident lack of clear thought about the war's objectives and consequences (the evidence is visible in our current engagement in northern Iraq), Bush grasped the root of the matter and acted accordingly.

Other figures flit through the pages of the book, but Woodward's depictions of them are almost random. Of greater significance is the way in which his stories illustrate certain fundamental characteristics of contemporary American civil-military relations. Clearly the miasma of Vietnam lies heavy on American strategists. "Vietnam Syndrome was alive and well," Scowcroft is reported to have believed, early in the crisis. The persistent declaration (to each other for comfort, to subordinates for direction) that this war would not be like Vietnam suggests that our leaders will view every use of force in light of a grossly simplified understanding of the Southeast Asian experience.

When General Norman Schwarzkopf, the theater commander, discussed political limits on the use of force in a war with Iraq, Cheney reminded him that "the president has said he does not want another Vietnam." Powell's operations officer, Lieutenant General Tom Kelly of television fame, is described as noting with approval how Powell ensured "that he was the military's point man with the civilians.... To avoid a repeat of the military's Vietnam nightmare—President Lyndon Johnson leaning over maps in the White House, circling specific targets—Powell had kept as much air-targeting information as possible out of Washington." This pervasive and unreasoning anxiety about Vietnam found its apotheosis in Cheney's reported remark to Prince Bandar, the Saudi ambassador, that "the military is finished in [American] society, if we screw this up."

Fear of failure in the Vietnamese way accounted in part for the vast military buildup in the Persian Gulf that the Bush administration launched in November 1990—a doubling of all forces and the dispatch of the better half of the United States Army to the Saudi desert. General Tony McPeak, Dugan's successor, told Powell that given that Iraq was a peculiarly vulnerable Third World opponent, "We ought to be trying to make it look easy, instead of making it look hard." This was good strategic sense, but it was rebuffed. Understanding the internal relations of the Pentagon, McPeak refrained from making his point either to Cheney or to Bush.

Woodward's account shows, in fact, just how empty the Vietnam analogy really is. Take, for example, the complaint about "micromanagement," of excessive Washington-based civilian control of military operations. Since Vietnam, military leaders in Washington have done much more micromanaging than their civilian counterparts. According to Woodward, for example, it was Powell who changed, at the last moment, the aim points for F-117 stealth fighter-bombers in Panama. It was this last minute change that was largely responsible for the pilot confusion that led one of the aircraft to aim its bombs at the wrong target. (Ironically, Cheney's mistrust of the Air Force was heightened by that episode, which was not properly reported to him.)

And according to Woodward, it was Powell who reduced the number of bridges targeted in downtown Baghdad from six to two, because he was convinced that it would not be in American interests to defeat the Iraqis totally. In the age of instant communications a general can, as Powell reportedly did, chew out a theater commander in Saudi Arabia for failing to provide information within thirty minutes. In another episode, Powell called Southcom chief General Maxwell Thurman and rebuked him for invading the Nicaraguan ambassador's residence in Panama; and when Thurman said that the building was not necessarily the residence, Woodward reports that Powell barked, "I just saw it on CNN. Stop bullshitting me. We did it."

None of these interventions was improper. Some (the last in particular) were not merely prudent, they were required to fulfill the aims of American policy. But they show that the tension between Pentagon commands and theater (or even lower level) commands has sources other than hectoring by civilian amateurs. And they demonstrate that political considerations can (and should) shape even the most technical military calculations, such as moving bombing aim points a hundred yards to avoid killing too many Panamanians.

The most significant institutional fact that emerges from *The Commanders* is, again, one easily visible from other sources, but illustrated particularly vividly here: the rise of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and his fewer than 2,000-man Joint Staff. To be fair, Powell has simply exercised fully the powers granted by the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. But with what results? When he took over, he ceased the practice of having Joint Staff operations people brief Cheney and his staff. He alone would do that; and the book illustrates repeatedly his determination that the chairman of the Joint Chiefs should be the sole conduit of military advice to the civilian leadership.

The service chiefs seem to have been effectively excluded from all higher level strategic planning and debates, with the result that civilians did not hear McPeak's view that the United States was prepared to go to war with Iraq well be-

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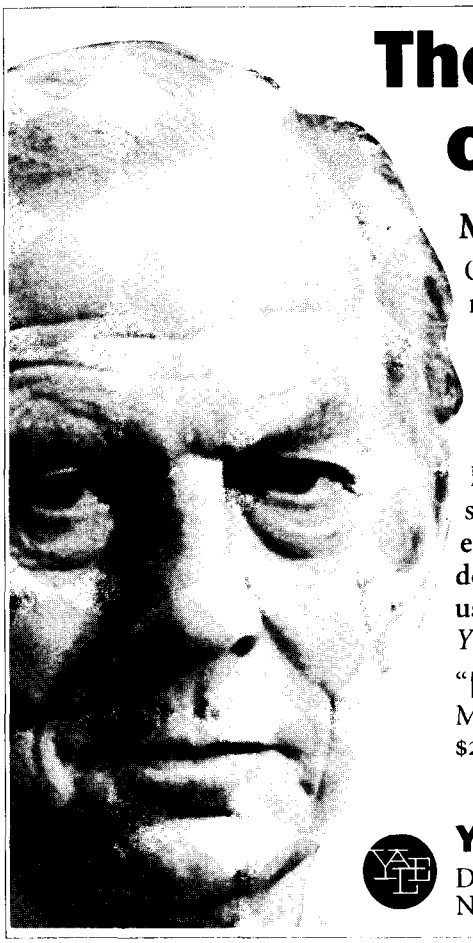
fore January 1991. Woodward depicts the president's two meetings with the assembled Joint Chiefs of Staff as formalities, not as councils of war. Kelly (a member of the Joint Staff) notes with satisfaction that the influence of the service chiefs on strategy "hovered somewhere around zero." Serious dissenting views, including Dugan's conviction that the war could be won largely (though not entirely) through air power, were viewed as a blow to "the joint consensus ... Powell had worked so hard to maintain among the services and the chiefs."

In the past, military consensus emerged from logrolling among the services; now it stems from the will of a forceful chairman. But consensus it remains. If Woodward is right, when the use of force was contemplated in Panama and the Persian Gulf, the civilian leaders were briefed not on several military options, with their associated risks and benefits, but on one plan and one plan only.

So what? The United States won handily in both Panama and Iraq. And yet we must consider the long-term consequences of reducing military advice to one source. We are now institutionalizing a system in which civilian leaders, with the possible exception of the secretary himself, will have little access to a crypto-General Staff that is acutely jealous of its prerogatives. The victories in Panama and Iraq were overdetermined; the odds in every respect, from intelligence gathering, to weapons technologies, to basing structure, to the quality and even quantity of fighting men and matériel, were overwhelmingly in our favor. In more difficult or ambiguous circumstances, however, the flaws in our approach to the making of strategy would be perilous—indeed, so they might have seemed if the Iraq war had taken a nasty turn.

Woodward has a gift for tittle-tattle, but almost in spite of itself, his book is a useful spur to reflection on larger issues of civilian control of the military in late twentieth-century America. Woodward summarizes a speech honoring Dwight D. Eisenhower that Powell gave on October 14, 1990, in Abilene, Kansas, and observes that Powell "sensed a kinship with Eisenhower and aspired to be like him." This may be a mischievous tweak on Woodward's part, since there is little evidence to suggest that General Powell yearns to occupy the White House. Those with a taste for irony, however, may well imagine a time fifteen years hence, when President Powell, like President Eisenhower before him, will finish his term of office deploring an edifice whose foundations he helped to build. ●



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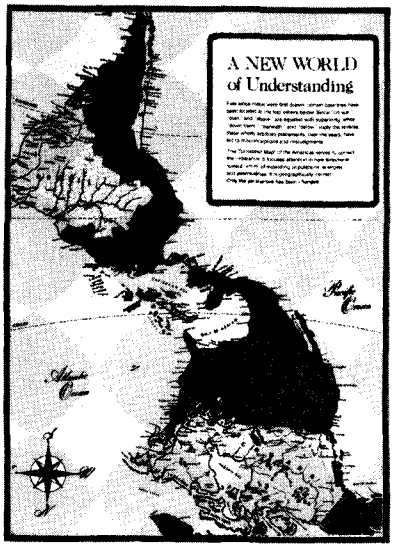

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translated by Deborah Lucas Schneider

(Harvard University Press, 349 pp., $29.95)

The conventional account of the behavior of the German legal profession under Hitler, including the judiciary and the legal professoriat, is the following. Before, after, and even to some extent during the nightmare that was the Third Reich, German justice maintained its traditional Prussian rectitude and efficiency. Hitler subverted the norms of legality, to be sure, but he did so by bypassing the regular courts and establishing distinctively Nazi institutions (the SS, the Gestapo, the People's Court that tried the July 20 conspirators) to exterminate his political enemies and to implement his racist and eugenic policies. Within their diminished sphere, largely though of course not completely untouched by Nazi ideology and personnel, the ordinary judges and the ordinary lawyers conducted the ordinary business of the law, sometimes indeed offering at least passive resistance to the regime. If these judges did not resist more—if, indeed, they often enforced Nazi laws in an unquestioning manner—it was because they were afraid for their lives, and also because they were schooled in the ingrained positivism of German legal thought, that is, in the idea that the content of the law is exhausted in the enactments of the duly constituted authorities: the judge cannot bend, let alone nullify, such enactments by appealing to principles of natural law.

This is the story that the German legal establishment has maintained throughout the postwar period, and it is, I believe, largely accepted by the handful of American lawyers and jurists who concern themselves with such matters. Ingo Müller's book challenges this story at every point. Written by a German lawyer, published in Germany four years ago, and now expertly translated into English by Deborah Lucas Schneider, *Hitler's Justice* tells an ugly story of moral corruption and professional degradation that begins shortly after the creation of the German empire in 1871 and lasts a full century—and that has very little to do, incidentally, with legal positivism.

This story, so different from what is generally believed, begins with Bismarck's packing the German judiciary with ultraconservative statists whose motto was "What the army is at our borders, our decisions must be within it!" In one of its many foolish decisions, the Weimar Republic retained all the imperial judges in their jobs and guaranteed them against dismissal. They proved a subversive force, bending and twisting the law so that it descended with savage force on the heads of left-wingers but let off far more dangerous right-wingers, such as Hitler, with a slap on the wrist. For Hitler's treasonous participation in the Munich "Beer Hall Putsch" of 1923, the minimum sentence prescribed by statute was five years in prison; and because Hitler was already on probation for another offense, the sentence could not be suspended in whole or in part. The statute further required that a foreign offender—Hitler was still a citizen of Austria—be deported. Nevertheless, the court suspended all but six months of Hitler's sentence, with the brief period of imprisonment to be served in comfort in a lavishly appointed castle, and it refused to order him deported, because "in the case of a man whose thoughts and feelings are as German as Hitler's, the court is of the opinion that the intent and purpose of the law have no application."

Although German law made it an offense to vilify publicly the constitutionally established form of government (that is, the Weimar Republic), the German Supreme Court permitted the use of the term "Jew republic" on the ground that "it can denote the new legal and social order in Germany which was brought about in significant measure by German and foreign Jews" and "the disproportionate power and disproportionate influence which, in the opinion of many citizens, a small number of Jews, relative to the total population, actually wields." On the other hand, a worker who carried a sign reading "Workers, burst your chains!" was sent to prison for inciting class hatred. Müller gives other examples of the blatant partiality of the German

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judiciary during the Weimar period, in light of which one is not surprised that Hitler saw no need to make wholesale changes in the judiciary when he took power.

The Jews and the handful of social democrats in the judiciary were, of course, expelled; and Jews were gradually extruded from the legal profession as well, along with such dubious characters as the non-Jewish attorney who continued to consult a physician to whose treatment she owed her life, even though she had "acquired knowledge that Dr. M. was a member of the Jewish race." In 1938 the remaining Jewish lawyers were reclassified as "Jewish legal advisers" and confined to acting on behalf of Jews. ("The German guardian of the law for the German! The Jewish adviser for the Jew! Once again German lawyers can take pride in the title of attorney!") A third of the nation's law professors—the Jewish third—were dismissed, replaced by young men who, still teaching and writing late into the 1960s, constituted a powerful cadre of apologists for the behavior of the profession during the Hitler era. Yet it was not one of these youngsters, but a law professor who had held his chair since 1919, who in 1933 exhorted his colleagues

> to extol the Führer as a figure of light and a hero who is leading the German soul out of the depths into the light, showing it the safe path to Valhalla, to God the Father in the true German homeland, setting an example of this Gothic life to his own brothers, offering them help to help themselves, so that all Germans may become brothers before God the Father.

Purged of its Jews and its democrats, the judiciary put its shoulder to the Nazi wheel with enthusiasm. A portent of things to come was the Reichstag-fire trial, conducted before the German Supreme Court in the fall of 1933. Although four of the five defendants were acquitted, the prosecutor himself had requested the acquittal of three of them, apparently out of concern for foreign reactions to Nazi justice. The court condemned the fifth to death under a law that had been passed after the crime had been committed. The court dismissed the suspicion that the Nazis themselves had started the fire with the remarkable statement that "the [National Socialist] party's ethical principles of restraint preclude the very possibility of such crimes and actions as are ascribed to them by unprincipled agitators."

Flexible interpretation was used to Nazify laws inherited from the previous regime and to amplify the effect of the Nazi laws themselves. As one judge put it,

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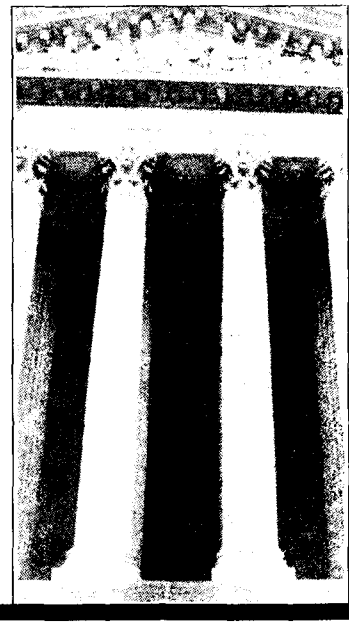

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"Eliminating the last traces of the enemy within is undoubtedly a part of the restoration of German honor. German judges can participate in this task through generous interpretation of the penal code." In upholding convictions of members of the (banned) Social Democratic Party, a decision rendered in 1934 took judicial notice that "the activities of the Social Democrats who have fled abroad are intended to prepare the violent overthrow of the constitution, which has been guaranteed by the new government with the support of the entire population." The constitution to which the court was referring was the Weimar constitution, although the "new government"—Hitler's—far from guaranteeing the Weimar constitution, was busy subverting it.

It was, for the most part, establishment conservatives rather than Nazi hotheads who fashioned the new jurisprudence, in which, as leaders of the profession explained, judges were to "make value judgments which correspond to the National Socialist legal order and the will of the political leadership," in which people could be punished for an act that while not punishable by any law "deserves punishment according to . . . healthy public opinion," in which the maxim "no crime without punishment" trumped the older maxim "no punishment without law," and in which criminal law's "ultimate function is to exterminate." No doubt the initiative for the passage of the Nuremberg race laws was Hitler's, but the judiciary enforced them with relish in opinions full of angry references to "Jewish effrontery, Jewish contempt for German laws, Jewish lasciviousness, and Jewish unscrupulousness":

> It is a monstrous instance of shamelessness that in November 1937 a Jew, in full knowledge of the unbending determination of the German people to secure its future for all time by maintaining the purity of its blood, and in full knowledge of the severe sentences widely known . . . to be given to defilers of the race, spoke in the street to a girl clearly and immediately recognizable as being of German blood and made her his mistress.

Despite the reference to "clearly and immediately recognizable as being of German blood," a Jew could be guilty no matter what the lengths to which he had gone to determine whether his sexual partner was Jewish. Nor was it necessary that German "bloodlines" actually be in peril. One Jew was sent to prison for "the offense of looking across the street at the 15-year-old ('German-blooded') Ilse S., 'if not importunately, then at least so as to attract notice.' " Another Jew, who may have become sexually excited while being massaged by a German woman, though the woman noticed no signs of such excitement, was sentenced to two years, in an opinion (signed by a judge who was still sitting in 1975) that described the Jew as

> an inferior human being. The offense in this case was committed approximately three years after the Nuremberg laws took effect. It represents an extraordinary piece of effrontery on the part of the accused to have dared, at this date, to abuse the witness as the object of his sexual lust.

Don't be fooled by the fact that these were merely prison sentences. After serving their time, Jews and other racial or political enemies of the regime were released to the custody of the Gestapo for transfer to concentration camps.

It is true that new courts, including the Special Courts, the People's Court, and the "Hereditary Health Courts," were created to share the dirty work with the regular courts, eventually taking over much of their criminal jurisdiction. But this devolution of authority is not a point in mitigation of the legal profession's complicity with the regime. The new courts were staffed by regular judges. Roland Freisler, the notorious president of the People's Court, was not a Nazi hack but, as Müller explains, a "highly gifted jurist," a "brilliant legal thinker," "an expert whom law professors were fond of citing."

Things were bad enough before World War II, but after the war broke out, and even before it began to go badly for the Germans, they got much worse. The treatment of Jews and Poles by the German courts set up in the areas of Poland occupied by Germany was particularly vile. Proceedings were conducted in German whether or not the defendant understood the language. Jews and Poles were not permitted to testify under oath, the theory being that their testimony was inherently unworthy of belief. The punishments, often for conduct that no civilized country, then or now, recognized as a crime, were savage. One young Polish woman, for example, was sentenced to death for having received as a present a fur jacket that had been stolen from the winter collection of clothing for the eastern front, though she neither knew nor had reason to know it was stolen. Another Polish woman was sentenced to death for having struck, probably accidentally, a German woman during a scuffle started by the German. The German woman was not injured. The court found the Polish woman's "claim that she did not realize she was dealing with a German 'unconvincing,' since she ought to have recognized that Mrs. Baschek's self-confident demeanor was 'clearly and beyond doubt the manner of a German.' "

But the courts treated full-blooded Germans badly enough. Georg Hopfe, who in the course of courageously saving the contents of a burning building stole a bottle of perfume and a knockwurst, was sentenced to death, along with a companion who had stolen two bars of soap in the salvage operation. Several German soldiers were executed for desertion after Germany's unconditional surrender to the Allies had taken effect. (There is a strange echo here of Kant's dictum that a society would be morally obligated to carry out a death sentence even if, the society having agreed to dissolve, no interest in deterrence would be served by carrying out the sentence.) By the end of the Nazi era, Müller estimates, German courts had sentenced 80,000 persons to death, and 80 percent of the sentences had been carried out.

Müller is able to find only one judge who "refused to serve the regime from the bench." His name was Dr. Lothar Kreyssig, a county court judge. A series of acts of insubordination by this upstanding man (a devout Lutheran) culminated in his issuing an injunction against several hospitals to prevent them from shipping patients to concentration camps for extermination under the euthanasia program, and in his attempting to get a Nazi Party leader prosecuted criminally for his part in the program. When the German minister of justice ordered Kreyssig to withdraw the injunction, Kreyssig refused and requested early retirement. Oddly, not only was the request granted, but Kreyssig was given his full pension—and this was in 1942. He was allowed to live out the war in peace.

With the war over and Germany occupied, the Allies made some efforts to cleanse the judiciary, and in doing so to make room for Jewish and other judges and law professors who had been driven into exile by the Nazi regime. The German legal establishment fought this campaign tooth and nail, ultimately with success. Those exiles who had received judicial or university appointments right after the war ended were fired a few years later, when the newly formed West German Republic passed a law guaranteeing re-employment to all members of the civil (including judicial) service of the Third Reich, other than a handful who had occupied "political" posts. (Shades of Weimar's decision to retain the members of the imperial judiciary.) That handful, including some who had been convicted at the Nuremberg trials, received generous pensions. Franz Schlegelberger, for example, undersecretary

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in the Ministry of Justice, and for a time acting minister, during the Nazi era, a man deeply implicated in the various exterminations conducted by the Nazis and sentenced to life imprisonment at Nuremberg (but released in 1951), was awarded a monthly pension of 2,894 marks (seven times the average monthly wage of a skilled worker), plus 160,000 marks in back pension—notwithstanding that Hitler had given him 109,000 marks upon his retirement in 1942.

A decided lack of tact was evident in some of the postwar appointments. One judge of the Hitler era "was named presiding judge of a board in Hamburg to hear the cases of war victims claiming damages; here he decided claims filed by the survivors of his own earlier trials, and by the relatives of those he had sentenced to death." That judge I mentioned earlier who was still sitting in 1975 rendered a decision in that year that barred a member of the Communist Party from teaching, on the ground that she knew "that the federal government considers the goals of this political party opposed to the constitution," just as the Jew had known about the racial policy of Hitler's government, as embodied in the Nuremberg laws. The judge was joined in this decision by a colleague who had been a high-ranking SS police officer in the occupied territories during World War II. None of the judges whose egregious decisions during the Nazi period Müller quotes lost his job after the war.

The spirit of Nazism survived—much diminished, to be sure—in the postwar German courts; this was no surprise, since the personnel was so largely unchanged. As part of its population policy, the Nazi regime had expanded the definition of illegal homosexual relations and made the punishment of them more severe. A postwar statute forbade judges to enforce Nazi laws that had made the punishment of pre-existing crimes more severe but permitted the enforcement of laws newly enacted in the Nazi era, provided such laws had not been based on National Socialist principles. To get around these limitations, the courts first classified the Nazi amendment of the homosexual statute as a new law, rather than as a law punishing a pre-existing crime more severely, and then declared that the new law had been "justified on objective grounds and can thus not be regarded as part of National Socialist doctrine."

Yet when the defendants were Nazis rather than homosexuals or left-wingers, the full armamentarium of legal casuistry was placed at the disposal of the defendants, in a reprise of the Weimar era. So

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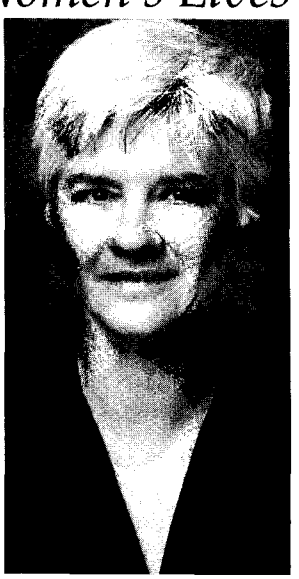

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The Political Responsibility of Intellectuals

IAN MACLEAN,
ALAN MONTEFIORE and
PETER WINCH, editors

The Political Responsibility of Intellectuals addresses the many problems in defining the relationship of intellectuals to the society in which they live. In what respects are they responsible for, and to, that society?

Contributors: *Alan Montefiore, Peter Winch, Ernest Gellner, Elemer Hankiss, Jerzy Jedhicki, Jacek Kurczewski, Jean-Jaques Lecercle, David J. Levy, Grahame Lock, Ian Maclean, Miklos Molnar, Jerzy Szacki, G. M. Tamas, Edward Shils.*

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a man who had been the Gestapo chief in Danzig during the war, and had personally killed four English prisoners, was acquitted of the charge of accomplice to murder, because "with reference to the killing of these four officers in Danzig, the perpetrator was the former Führer and chancellor of the Reich, Adolf Hitler." Applying the doctrine of lenity to Hitler, the court held that "it cannot be proven with sufficient certainty that Hitler had an even limited premeditation or malicious intent." So the Gestapo chief was merely an accomplice to manslaughter and was sentenced to two years.

Those who sought to reopen cases that had been brought in the Nazi era were uniformly rebuffed, since "every government, even a totalitarian one, has a right to defend its own interests. No reproach may be made of the fact that in times of crisis, it resorts to extraordinary measures of deterrence." According to Müller, "A West German court has never summoned the courage to declare a single Nazi decision 'null and void,' " not even the decision by the People's Court condemning the July 20 conspirators, though, he remarks, "Hitler had publicly announced the forthcoming executions even before the verdict was reached." But a West German court did declare a postwar trial *of Nazis* null and void because of procedural irregularities.

The West German reparations law, applicable to persons who had suffered "because of their opposition to National Socialism or because of their race, creed, or ideology," was narrowly interpreted, so that Gypsies, for example, were ineligible for reparations because "in spite of the occurrence of racial considerations, the measures taken were based not on race as such but rather on the Gypsies' asocial characteristics." Yet commentators on the Nazi race laws had said that "as a rule, in Europe only Jews and Gypsies [are] of alien blood," and Himmler had instructed the SS and the police that it was time "to deal with the Gypsy question in connection with the nature of the race."

How to explain a century of betrayal of the norms of legality and justice by the German judiciary? Having emphasized the judges' refusal to be cabined by a narrow literalism, Müller naturally does not endorse the proposition that German legal education was too positivistic, but he does say that the "fixation on government characteristic of such a large part of the judiciary" made it easy for them to adapt to conditions in the Third Reich. His main explanation is simply that the judges whom Hitler inherited from Weimar were a highly nationalistic, ultraconservative group deeply offended by conditions under Weimar and broadly sympathetic to the goals and the methods of the Nazi regime. And not only those judges, but also judges and law professors first appointed in the Hitler era, carried Nazi habits of thought forward into the postwar era and, moreover, wanted to whitewash the judicial performance during that era.

There are two large questions about *Hitler's Justice*. The first is whether it gives an accurate and balanced picture of the German legal and judicial scene before, during, and after the Nazi era. The second is whether, if so, the book gives a convincing explanation for that scene. I cannot answer the first question. Every quotation and significant assertion in the book is footnoted, the book contains an introduction by a specialist in comparative law at Harvard Law School, the author is a (West) German lawyer, ex-law professor, and government official, the tone is sober and factual, and it is published by a distinguished university press. There is no reason to question the accuracy of its contents. But is the picture it presents a balanced one? I do not doubt that Müller found only one authentic example of heroic resistance to the Nazi regime by a judge, but how hard did he look? Could there not have been more cases in which a judge tried to mitigate the severity of a Nazi law? The book is anecdotal, not systematic. It quotes dozens, perhaps scores, of decisions, but out of thousands. How representative are the decisions that he cites, the opinions that he quotes? Müller himself notes, even emphasizes, that during the Nazi era most appeals were by prosecutors, complaining of erroneous acquittals or too lenient sentences, rather than by defendants. Shouldn't the authors of those lower-court decisions (invariably reversed) be commended?

Even I happen to know—and I am no expert—of one good decision by a German court during the Nazi period. The decision, which was affirmed on appeal and is not discussed by Müller, held that a half-Jewish woman who attended Jewish New Year's services in order to preserve family peace did not have a sufficient tie to the Jewish community to be classified as a Jew under the Nuremberg laws, which exempted a half-Jew who was not married to a Jew and did not profess the Jewish religion. Nor does Müller consider the possibility that judges may occasionally have meted out long prison sentences during the Nazi period to protect the defendants, who could expect to be carted off to concentration camps by the Gestapo upon the completion of their prison sentences. And discussion of the

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Weimar and modern eras is skimpy. The ugly decisions of those eras that Müller cites and quotes from may be quite isolated—although Judith Shklar, in her book *Legalism: Laws, Morals, and Political Trials*, which appeared in 1964, has provided additional evidence that the judges indeed subverted the Weimar government.

So I don't know whether the book is adequately balanced. But the author has made a prima facie case that the German judiciary was rotten for a century or more, and it is now up to its defenders to reply to him.

As for Müller's explanation for this state of affairs, I find it more convincing than the conventional view that German legal education and tradition were excessively positivistic. German judges in the period studied by Müller did engage in hair-splitting casuistry, strict construction, disavowal of personal responsibility, and all the other tricks of the legal positivist. But they did so opportunistically, to give their decisions the appearance of legality. They were not acting under the compulsion of a reflex induced by miseducation. They were not victims of brainwashing by law professors.

The German jurists' rationalization of judicial activism during the Nazi era should make our own judicial activists, realists, utilitarians, and pragmatists squirm. (I am one of these utilitarians and pragmatists, and I am squirming as I write this.) "Abstract" thinking was denounced in favor of the "teleological" method, "which encouraged judges to identify a particular ideological meaning and intent underlying a given law and then to use this intent to determine" the law's meaning; or the holistic method, in which, as leaders of the profession explained, cases are decided "not on the basis of an analytical investigation of their elements, but only as wholes, concretely, after grasping their essence":

> The courts to which the Third Reich has assigned responsibility for administering justice can carry out this task . . . only if they do not remain glued to the letter of the law, but rather penetrate its inner core in their interpretations and do their part to see that the aims of the lawmaker are realized.

One law professor wrote that "behavior is unlawful when its general tendency in the judgment of jurisprudence does more harm than good to the state and its members," and another dismissed the possibility of misdiagnosing conditions warranting involuntary sterilization (a procedure that carried with it a five percent risk of death) by remarking that "for family members the loss is naturally very severe, but the human race loses so many members to errors that one more or less hardly matters."

I would put the matter more bluntly than Müller. Legal method or judicial philosophy is at best a tool, more often a style, sometimes even a pose, rather than an ideology. Judges—not all, but most—who are sympathetic to the principles and the policies of the government they serve will decide cases in harmony with those principles and policies, and those who are not won't. This is regardless, I think, of whether the judges are career judges and specialists, like the German judges, or lateral-entry generalists, like most of our judges. Like many other German conservatives, the German judges were hostile to Weimar, sympathetic to Nazism, unsympathetic to de-Nazification (particularly, of course, to their own de-Nazification). And they had a stroke of luck in the cold war. The United States and Bonn wanted West Germany to be a bulwark of anti-communism. The Nazi judicial holdovers were eager to man the ramparts.

This seems pretty much the full explanation for the story that Müller tells. Whether that story is the complete story is, as I have said, another question, one beyond my competence to answer. But it is natural to wonder whether traces of the vicious behavior that he depicts can be found in our own judiciary. I fear that

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they can, and this without going back to the Fugitive Slave Laws. Our retention, indeed our expanding use, of capital punishment, our other exceptionally severe criminal punishments (many for intrinsically minor, esoteric, or archaic offenses), our adoption of pretrial detention (as a result of which some criminal defendants languish in jail for two years or more while awaiting trial), and our enormous prison and jail population (almost 1 million—close to one-half of one percent of the American population), mark us as the most penal of the civilized nations today. This is a disturbing state of affairs—justifiable perhaps, but deeply problematic.

But these are matters primarily of legislative policy rather than of judicial behavior, which is the particular focus of Müller's book. Two of the lasting impressions of the book are, first, the extraordinary plasticity of legal rhetoric, which enables a judge to find a plausible form of words to clothe virtually any decision, however barbarous; and second, and more interesting, the German judges' overidentification with the Nazi regime. We have judges who impose savage sentences on minor drug dealers with obvious relish. In thereby enlisting in the "war against drugs," these judges may remind readers of *Hitler's Justice* of the German judges' self-description as fighters on the internal battlefront, battlers against "the enemy within."

Perhaps in the fullness of time the growing of marijuana plants, the "manipulation" of financial markets, the sale of dirty magazines, the bribery of foreign government officials, the facilitating of suicide by the terminally ill, and the violation of arcane regulations governing the financing of political campaigns will come to seem no more appropriate objects of criminal punishment than "dishonoring the race." Perhaps not; but Müller's book can in any event help us to see that judges should not be eager enlisters in popular movements of the day, or allow themselves to become so immersed in a professional culture that they are oblivious to the human consequences of their decisions.

RICHARD A. POSNER is a judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit and a senior lecturer at the University of Chicago Law School. He is the author of, among other books, *The Problems of Jurisprudence* (Harvard University Press).

Portraits and Puzzles

BY CHRISTOPHER BENFEY

Flow Chart
by John Ashbery

(Knopf, 216 pp., $20)

No American poet now writing arouses as much hostility as John Ashbery, or as much adulation. This most disarming of our poets is routinely assailed for superficiality, hermeticism, and (most damning of all) a lack of seriousness. He once began a reading, after a singularly wary introduction by (as I seem to remember) a nervous librarian, with the promise: "This won't hurt." Ashbery's apologists haven't helped the situation much; with a few exceptions, they prefer to sidestep the challenge of lucidly explicating his work. And fawning critics continue to gesture vaguely toward places where Ashbery supposedly takes us. Two blurbs from the jacket of Ashbery's strongest book, *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (1975), sound the intrepid explorer theme: "his astonishing explorations of places where no one has ever been"; "dazzling orchestrations of language open up whole areas of consciousness no other American poet has even begun to explore." As Ashbery wryly remarks in his new book, *Flow Chart*, "Repetition makes reputation."

It isn't Ashbery's fault that his career of four decades has been haunted by the emperor's new clothes. He has never hidden his aims and his strategies, nor has he shied from presenting himself in the most naked light possible. His most interesting poems have always been self-portraits, unforgiving portrayals of his own puzzlement. The early "Picture of Little J.A. in a Prospect of Flowers," with its title from Marvell, gave a haunting sense of how our words come to supplant our lives: "Still, as the loveliest feelings / Must find words, and these, yes, / Displace them." Then there was the remarkable "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," with its tortured sense that our inner life may be an illusion, dreamed from appearances: "that the soul is not a soul, / Has no secret, is small, and it fits / Its hollow perfectly: its room, our moment of attention." In poems like these, Ashbery forged a distinction between autobiography and self-portraiture. He wasn't dredging up luminous experiences from his past life; he isn't a confessional poet. Instead he was trying to measure, at a given moment, what could be known of his face and his feelings.

Two divergent impulses have ruled Ashbery's writing from the start. One is the search for a Whitmanian form that can include everything; the other is the attempt to eliminate everything extraneous. The late David Kalstone, still Ashbery's best critic, called these extremes "copiousness" and "concision." And Ashbery himself has written of the conflict in his poetry between "The extreme austerity of an almost empty mind / Colliding with the lush, Rousseau-like foliage of its desire to communicate" (from "And *Ut Pictura Poesis* is Her Name," in *Houseboat Days*, 1977). The alternatives are restated at the outset of Ashbery's experimental prose poems of 1972, *Three Poems*:

> I thought that if I could put it all down, that would be one way. And next the thought came to me that to leave all out would be another, and truer, way.

But leaving things out turns out to lead right back to self-portraiture: "forget as we will, something soon comes to stand in their place. Not the truth, perhaps, but—yourself."

Ashbery provides many fine examples of rigorous excision, as in his lovely answer to "What Is Poetry," from *Houseboat Days*:

> The medieval town, with frieze
> Of boy scouts from Nagoya? The snow
>
> That came when we wanted it to snow?
> Beautiful images? Trying to avoid
>
> Ideas, as in this poem? But we
> Go back to them as to a wife, leaving
>
> The mistress we desire? Now they
> Will have to believe it
>
> As we believe it. In school
> All the thought got combed out:
>
> What was left was like a field.
> Shut your eyes, and you can feel it for miles
> around.
>
> Now open them on a thin vertical path.
> It might give us—what?—some flowers
> soon?

Here all the academic ideas of poetry are dismissed one by one: striking juxtapositions (the Japanese boy scouts on holiday); expectations aroused and fulfilled (the snow); images rather than ideas; moral arguments (the wife instead of the mistress). And the poem leaves us with the question mark that is

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conspicuously missing from the title.

Ashbery has written such oblique and quizzical lyrics at every stage of his career. It is in his longer poems, however, that one has a sense of development, and specifically of an ever more ravenous appetite for the confusion of the quotidian. Ashbery's recent titles—*Houseboat Days*, *A Wave* (1984), *April Galleons* (1987)—have turned liquid, as though his subjects keep spilling over their containers. Such early, longish poems as "The Skaters" (1966) seem almost epistolary in their friendly desire to report ("So much has passed through my mind this morning / That I can give you but a dim account of it. . . ."), while the elegant prose of *Three Poems* has a chaste, Cartesian decorum.

Flow Chart, Ashbery's new book-length poem, is exuberantly crude by contrast, even carnivalesque. With its long lines and sprawling verse paragraphs, it is the culminating work in Ashbery's search for what Auden called "a form that's large enough to swim in." The poem begins grandly and traditionally, evoking a river and a city with the authority of Spenser's "Prothalamion" or Hart Crane's *The Bridge*:

> Still in the published city but not yet
> overtaken by a new form of despair, I ask
> the diagram: is it the foretaste of pain
> it might easily be? Or an emptiness
> so sudden it leaves the girders
> whanging in the absence of wind,
> the sky milk-blue and astringent? We know
> life is so busy,
> but a larger activity shrouds it, and this is
> something
> we can never feel, except occasionally, in
> small signs
> put up to warn us and as soon expunged, in
> part
> or wholly.
> Sad grows the river god as he oars
> past us
> downstream without our knowing him . . . .

These opening lines, like many other passages in *Flow Chart*, are obsessed with their status as poetry: the city is not public but "published," the "new form" of the second line surely refers to this loose and baggy poem. The theme of erasure—of the past and the present—runs rough all of *Flow Chart*, and so does the compensating wish to leave some legacy or memorial behind, however modest ("the clues we / all leave behind are fated not to be found this time, / or if they are it will resemble something a squirrel laid there, a good while ago").

Surrounding the distractions of the city, where "life is so busy," is a sense of some "larger activity." This sometimes seems to be death (which "shrouds" life), and sometimes a religious awareness of a deeper but unknowable pattern (hence the pun on "wholly"). *Flow Chart* is Ashbery's most openly religious poem. It is filled with the kind of romantic yearning that one finds in Wordsworth or Hölderlin: we have come too late, the gods have departed, the radiance is lost forever:

> Although we mattered as children, as
> adults we're somehow counterfeit
> and not briefed as to what happened in the
> intervals to which this longing led us . . .

"We all live in the past now," Ashbery concludes.

But between the river of the opening lines and the bridge that is the poem's closing image, much happens that isn't entirely clear. Despite a fairly continual vitality of language and associational wit, it's hard to say precisely what the poem is about, what flow it's meant to chart. If the poem is Ashbery's most ambitious attempt to date to "put it all down," he makes enormous demands on his reader to assimilate it. Perhaps assimilation isn't what the reader should attempt, given the magnitude of Ashbery's commitment to recording the essential randomness of experience.

A frequent move on the part of critics in dealing with Ashbery's difficulty is to invoke trendy theoretical notions, such as the fragmentation of modern subjectivity. The poems are seen as demolition jobs around such dated and discredited constructions as the self, the soul, and all varieties of transcendence. But Ashbery's poetry in general, and *Flow Chart* in particular, works against the grain of such an argument. Of course, Ashbery concedes, one can live as though one is selfless, soulless, and godless; and his poetry is fully responsive to the nightmares of people who do so ("They grow up to be slim, / and tall, but often it seems something is lacking, / some point of concentration around which a soul can collect itself. . . . And when the pitcher / is emptied of milk, it is not refilled, but washed and put away on a shelf"). Ashbery gives free play to his own internal voices of skepticism, which are the source of some of his most coruscating and irritating insights. Still, he is finally wary of simply giving in to skepticism, and of losing "the soul we never knew we had and replaced with something / young, and easier."

In its search for that elusive soul, *Flow Chart* incorporates, among other things, bits and pieces of a rather conventional childhood on a farm, high school rituals, religious injunctions, early romances that seem fuller in retrospect than they did at the time of their unfurling. These fragments of a life partially retrieved flit through the poem without building into anything like a coherent narrative. The fragments themselves are often obscure, or garbled, as though the wires of memory have become crossed. And there are constant interruptions in entirely different keys: pseudo-scientific musings; bureaucratic analyses; mock editions of the evening news; and so on. Reading a lot of Ashbery can make one feel a little wretched, like watching a movie that is slightly out of focus, in a language that one has almost forgotten. It is a language that hovers on the verge of transparency, a monologue not quite overheard.

Ashbery himself is constantly inventing tropes for his own isolation:

> as though each spoke a different
> language with enough cognates
> to make us believe in deafness—*their*
> deafness
> . . . leaving our speech just sitting there,
> unrinsed, untasted, not knowing us,
> or caring to.

One is reminded, here and elsewhere, that Ashbery wrote his master's thesis at Columbia on Henry Green, a novelist who once invoked his own deafness as the reason for the strange disjunctions in his dialogue: "The very deaf, as I am, hear the most astounding things all round them, which have not, in fact, been said. This enlivens my replies until, through mishearing, a new level of communication is reached." Some such new

Two for Eschatology

I.

While we ate cheese, hunks
of bread torn off, drank wine,
he stood upon the table,
said "I'm the biggest man in the world!"

The others looked on and laughed
and his mother said "Get Down!"
"Except for Mohammed Ali," I said.
This was in Tetuan, Morocco.

The years fell away after that.

II.

Some have been blessed,
sent to Samarra,
their appointment kept after all . . .

between the lazy rivers of Eden,
shining like Eve's golden hair,
her thighs spread out on the sand . . .

with the beast about to be born.

David Ray

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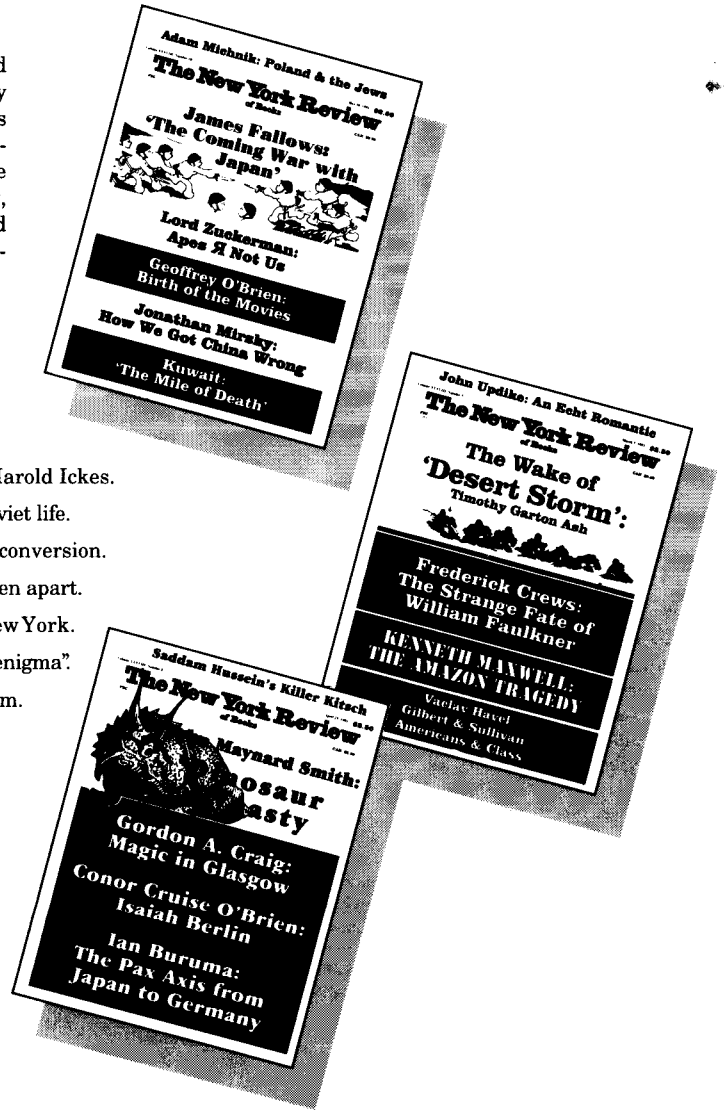
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level of communication seems to be what Ashbery is after in his new book.

His special register lies between parody and pathos, the one constantly shifting into and undercutting the other. A passage like the following is typical:

> But outside, the streetscape
> always looked refreshingly right, as though
> scene-painters had been at work, and
> then,
> at such moments, it was truly a pleasure to
> walk along, surprised yet not too
> surprised
> by every new, dimpled vista. People would
> smile at me, as though we shared some
> pleasant
> secret, or a tree would swoon into its
> fragrance, like a freshly unwrapped
> bouquet
> from the florist's. I knew then that nature
> was my friend. "We do it," the
> contractor said,
> "routinely."

It's the phrase "nature was my friend" that throws the sincerity of the whole passage into question and makes us wonder about those dimpled vistas and true pleasures. Of course the whole passage courts a sense of urban artifice, the scene-painters and the contractors at work. But whatever pleasure one took in that tree swooning into its fragrance is erased, at least for me, by a dawning sense of deliberate banality.

Ashbery's penchant for parody is more straightforward in the frequent epigrams that punctuate *Flow Chart*. "I will show you fear in a handful of specialists," he promises, or "I hear America snowing." An updated Ecclesiastes yields this dark wisdom: "There is a time for trying on / new clothes," and this: "Love, the Human Pool Table." And there are peculiar, unclassifiable insights: "Our privacy ends where the clouds' begins." But the long lines of the poem run counter to such epigrammatic concision (the epigram's ideal setting is the sonnet). And many of the parodic passages seem tired: "Full many a flower / is born to blush unseen, and waste its fragrance on the arctic air / outside the Shady Octopus saloon, and then some."

Ashbery's preference for yielding to what he calls "the whole freight train of associations" makes for a singularly promiscuous use of poetic language. He has an honest love of clichés and archaisms and inversions, of all the lyrical baggage that you're told to check at the door in creative writing classrooms. In one of his many stock-taking moments, Ashbery promises that "the form itself shall be timeless . . . It will take us down to about now, / though a few beautiful archaisms will be allowed to flutter in it." Words like "betimes" and "yea" and "alack"

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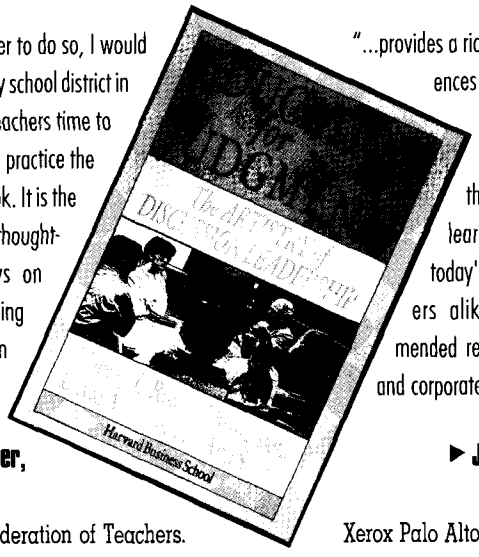

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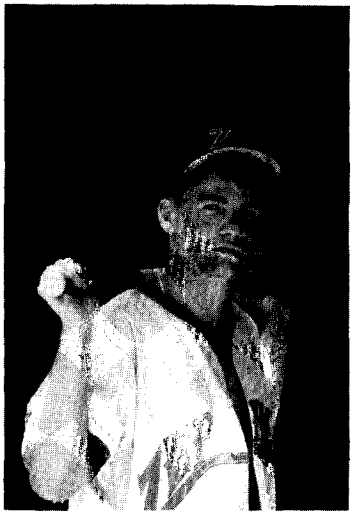

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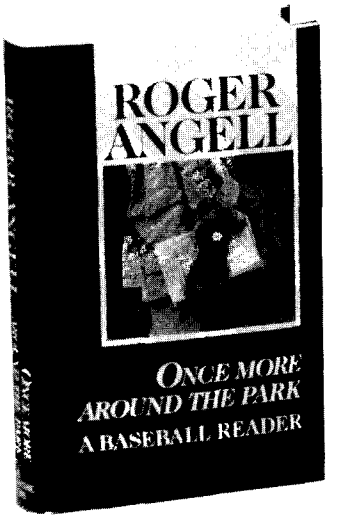

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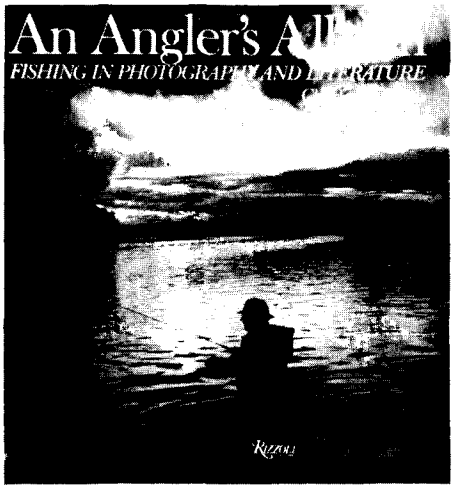

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and "ope" do indeed flutter in *Flow Chart*. This poet is like a man at play in a junkyard, or a library: "One lives thus, plucking a mean sort of living from the rubbish heaps / of history."

Ashbery's use of traditional verse forms is similarly parodic and opportunistic. His practice in this regard is precisely the opposite of formal poets like James Merrill or Richard Wilbur. Those poets use forms like the sonnet and the sestina to tighten and to order their vision, to give it contour. For Ashbery, by contrast, rhyme and meter act as disruptive forces; imposed from outside, they drive his poems further afield. His career-long pleasure in sestinas, of which he has published at least a half dozen, comes from the increased sense of waywardness that that exacting form allows him, a feeling he once described as "rather like riding downhill on a bicycle and having the pedals push your feet."

The elaborate double sestina toward the end of *Flow Chart* borrows its repeated end-words from a poem of Swinburne's in the same form. Thus, the rules and the words are not arrived at in the process of composition; they are its external starting point. (Ashbery is playing a version of the parlor game of *bouts-rimés*, in which the guests are given the rhymes and have to write a poem incorporating them.) Here are the opening lines:

> We're interested in the language, that you
> call breath,
> if breath is what we are to become, and we
> think it is, the southpaw said.
> Throwing her
> a bone sometimes, sometimes expressing,
> sometimes expressing something like
> mild concern, the way
> has been so hollowed out by travelers it has
> become cavernous. It leads to death.
> We know that, yet for a limited time only we
> wish to pluck the sunflower. . . .
> The day
> had begun inauspiciously, yet improved as
> it went along, until at bed-
> time it was seen that we had prospered, I
> and thee.

The carpe diem theme is all too familiar, and Ashbery gives it a characteristically parodic twist with the marketing phrase "for a limited time only." But he takes special pleasure, I think, in that recurring "thee" (it appears twelve more times in the poem), so odd in the same stanza as a word like "southpaw." Such jarring juxtapositions—the Japanese boy scouts in the medieval town—provide much of the charge in Ashbery's poetry.

The most powerful moments in *Flow Chart* are not quite moments of apology, but of something close to it, when Ashbery seems to be saying: "I know what you want, but I'm afraid you won't find it here." It is as though a pun were hidden in his name: you expect Keatsian "mellow fruitfulness," but you find ashes instead. Ashbery is constantly contrasting a poetry of sublimity and high ritual with a poetry of poverty and dailiness:

> Any day now you must start to dwell in it,
> the poetry, and for this, grave preparations
> must be made, the walks of sand
> raked, the rubble wall picked clean of dead
> vine stems, but what
> if poetry were something else entirely, not
> this purple weather
> with the eye of a god attached, that sees
> inward and outward? What if it were only a
> small, other way of living,
> like being in the wind? or letting the various
> settling sounds we hear now
> rest and record the effort any creature has
> to put forth to summon its spirits for a
> moment and then
> fall silent, hoping that enough has
> happened?

This is Ashbery's version of Wallace Stevens's "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock," where all the nightgowns are disappointingly white, and the weather is only red in a drunken sailor's dreams. It registers a recurrent fear in American poetry and prose, that we lack those "grave preparations" necessary for high art. Our defense is to claim that our art is elsewhere, in "a small, other way of living." Or as Frost put it in his "Oven Bird" sonnet: "The question that he frames in all but words / Is what to make of a diminished thing."

The paradox is that *Flow Chart* hardly seems like a diminished anything. "A small, other way of living" doesn't adequately describe its expansive energies, its garrulous forms of address. Those meek and elegiac gestures—letting the "setting sounds" rest, and falling silent—are temptations that the poem gives voice to and rejects. The poem's achievement lies in the variety of responses it offers to what Ashbery calls "the rubble" of past art. For what finally makes *Flow Chart* worth listening to is the sheer linguistic bravura of it.

But that is also what makes it disquieting. A "flow chart," according to the American Heritage Dictionary, is "a schematic representation of a sequence of operations." The operations in Ashbery's poem are primarily of verbal and imagistic association. But to my ear at least the schema is too often lacking. What made "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" so powerful was that Ashbery first displayed the form before dismantling it. The moment in the poem ("The balloon pops, the attention / Turns dully away") when Ashbery shifts his attention from his masterful commentary on Par-

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migianino's bizarre self-portrait to his own fragmented consciousness remains unnerving after repeated readings of the poem. We have been shown the chart, and then we are shown the flow that eludes it.

Flow Chart, by contrast, is too much flow and not enough chart. We are at sea in it. This may be, of course, precisely what Ashbery intended. He once defended the opacity of his poetry as

> a kind of mimesis of how experience comes to me: as one is listening to someone else—a lecturer, for instance—who's making perfect sense but suddenly slides into something that eludes one. What I am probably trying to do is to illustrate opacity and how it can suddenly descend over us, rather than trying to be willfully obscure.

It is, as so often with Ashbery, a disarming defense, but also an irritating one. Does one really want the experience of reading poetry to resemble a lecture that's difficult, or impossible, to follow? For a page, perhaps; disorientation has its charms. After a while, however, your mind wanders and you start eyeing the exits.

Flow Chart will probably attract the usual raves from casual readers and casual critics. You can dip into it with pleasure, and climb out of it without feeling you're missing much. But it has more demanding claims on our attention. Whether the poem has significant things to say about modern subjectivity (as I believe it does), or modern spirituality (I'm not sure), or the resources of poetic form (I doubt it) will take a while to test. Likewise, the ratio between the parodic and the pathetic will probably become clearer over time. We will find, I suspect, that Ashbery's parodies are strangely elegiac: they mourn the lost power of poetry even as they mime its past triumphs. Meanwhile, Ashbery's ultimate seriousness seems to me above dispute. The pattern of this emperor's clothes, like any of the season's newest fashions, may elude us for the moment. But in a few years, who knows, we might all be wearing it.

CHRISTOPHER BENFEY teaches at Mount Holyoke College. He is the author of *Emily Dickinson and the Problem of Others* (University of Massachusetts Press).

Moscow on the Seine

BY ANNE TYLER

The Tattered Cloak and Other Novels by Nina Berberova translated from the Russian by Marian Schwartz

(Knopf, 308 pp., $21)

For a quarter century, from 1925 to 1950, Nina Berberova lived among her fellow Russian émigrés in Paris. This period constituted the second of her three lives, as she has put it—the first life having been led in Russia and the third here in the United States, where she is now a citizen. In the context of her full ninety years, a quarter century seems a mere blink of an eye, but it has supplied nearly all of the material for her "novels," six of which have been collected in one volume as an introduction to American readers.

I place the word "novels" in quotation marks because by any standard these are really short stories. The average piece is only fifty-odd pages long; a couple are much briefer. Several do undertake to tell entire life sagas, or at least large chunks of life sagas, but even they are summary and highly selective, lacking the texture and the expansiveness that one would expect from a novel.

Whatever you choose to call them, all six works explore the world of postrevolutionary Russian émigrés in France—a world that Berberova has described in her autobiography as "miserable, stupid, stinking, pitiable, unhappy, cowardly, harassed—and hungry." Living quarters in these stories are generally cramped and filthy, and the means of livelihood often debasing. As one young girl says, after telling us how she dreamed of "silken and elegant" Paris before she moved there,

> When I looked out the window of our Paris apartment it seemed to me that everything was exactly as it had been at our old place: that feeling of being on the edge of a big city along with a multitude of poverty-stricken people, chiefly women, and chiefly old women at that; a quiet murky street with the smoking chimney of a commercial laundry and a blue locksmith's sign; over the sign an open window with a torn tulle curtain and behind that an old man inserting a set of false teeth in his wide wet mouth. Above it all there is a narrow stripe: a swatch of the local sky, gray and low. There, around the corner, and farther—the same street again, desolate and impoverished, where an ugly little girl who looks a little like me is walking. . . . All you hear is the pounding from the artificial sausage-casing factory. From time to time the din increases, which means they've opened the door to the street, and then the whole block, including our house, starts to smell of something rotten and astringent.

That young girl is the narrator of the title piece, which may be the strongest in the collection and is certainly the most representative. It begins in Russia in 1920, with a series of personal misfortunes. Nine-year-old Sasha's mother dies, her father loses his mind, her beloved older sister moves away to live with her lover, and the family's spacious apartment shrinks to a single bleak room. At 13 Sasha immigrates to Paris with her father, where she trudges toward middle age while ironing sheets ten hours a day in a laundry. Almost the only bright spot in her life is the memory of a story she once overheard her sister's lover, Samoilov, telling his friends—a story about a tattered cloak handed down through the generations. "It smelled of camphor and looked terribly big to us," he said, "but in the old days men must have been more substantial than we are." He ended by speaking to an imaginary "you":

> Now times are different. I must go one way, and you another. We'll rip this old cloak in two. It's gone out of style anyway. . . . You take the other half of this 2,000-year-old garment of ours. You run away from here, from me, from us. Run and don't look back, my sweet one, my love. Run over the seas and the mountains, run to other lands. Do not fear loneliness, do not fear your orphanhood. Live like a bird, perhaps the wind. Safeguard your young and tender life.

It's easy to see, after reading this story, why Nina Berberova has been called a latter-day Chekhov. She employs the same summing-up style of narrative, the same practice of inserting oddly jagged details and abrupt, arresting snips of dialogue ("Mark Twain once said to me, 'Listen, mister, I forget your name and patronymic. . . .' "), with one particular shimmering passage suddenly lending meaning to the whole.

The resemblance is especially apparent in "The Resurrection of Mozart," which is set in the suburbs on the eve of the bombing of Paris in 1940. Several people are discussing whom they would choose to resurrect if they had the power. Pushkin? Tolstoy? Napoleon? Their hostess, Maria Leonidovna, decides upon Mozart, and it's clear that for her Mozart symbolizes all that is gentle

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and civilized—the very opposite of the impending war. In the days that follow this conversation, hordes of fleeing Parisians begin to pass Maria Leonidovna's house. A man arrives dressed in obviously borrowed clothes and asks to sleep in her annex. He is a musician, he says with a slight foreign accent; but she hardly sees him because he spends most of his time in a deep, exhausted sleep. Eventually she has to ask him to leave; she will soon be fleeing herself, with her family. Her last view of him shows a lone figure walking away from her at a distance, which causes her to burst into tears. The story displays Berberova at her best—graceful and subtle as Chekhov, with that haunting undernote that you hear in some of Chekhov's plays.

This is not to say that she lacks her own voice. Here and there she adds fey touches that amount to a private system of physics. Pearls, she tells us, fetch no money at pawnshops because "they have a way of dying when separated from their owner." National disaster can be foretold by the fact that matches will no longer light. And "In Memory of Schliemann" describes a futuristic world so overpopulated that vacationers must wait on the beach in orderly rows before taking their turn in the ocean.

In one respect, alas, one wishes that she were *more* Chekhovian: she tends to paint in grosser, bolder strokes. "The Waiter and the Slut" (even the title suggests its failings) describes the precipitous descent of a woman who lives off men. By the time she meets her just desserts, she's so slatternly and disgusting that the reader has lost all concern for her. There's no shading to this story, no nuance; it hammers us over the head. The same goes for "Astashev in Paris," whose central character's unmitigated despicableness leaves us feeling cross with the author for selecting him. One longs for the kindly spirit of Chekhov, or of Isaac Bashevis Singer for that matter—another writer who depicts the forlorn world of the émigré, but with considerably more delicacy.

There's one glitch in the translation: forgetting that the verb endings reveal the sex of the speaker in Russian but not in English, Marian Schwartz allows us to read two-thirds of "The Black Pestilence" before we realize that the narrator is male—a fact that's important, since the story concerns the narrator's unconventional rooming arrangements with a strange young woman. Overall, though, the translation is skillful. And so is the collection itself—skillful and intelligent and thought provoking. If it seems at times overstated or heavy-handed, it compensates for that by holding up before us a small substratum of society that we might never otherwise have met. ●

TRB *continued from page 4*

wife." This was funny enough. It would have been funnier in *Times* style, though, which would have apologized for having "mischaracterized the relationship between William J. Bennett and one of his two best counselors. She is his wife."

Math seems to be a special problem for the *Times*. In January the paper apologized for having "misstated the value of 52 factorial, or 52 x 51 x 50, etc." in an article about card shuffling. Then in May it apologized for having "misstated the product of 100 x 99 x 98 and so on" in an article about "finding the shortest path around a group of cities." The latter correction was a true groveler, listing four other errors in the same article and ending with an apology for not having run the correction sooner.

Excessive groveling is enjoyable; inadequate groveling is more so. With the jovial headline "OOPS!" a local hardware chain recently took space in the *Post* to correct an earlier ad:

> This week's Hechinger circular incorrectly states on page 15, "Free stainless steel sink with any kitchen cabinet purchase." The correct copy should read, "Free kitchen installation videotape with purchase of 8 or more cabinets."

"Oops," my eye. Despite the effort to laugh off the error as a mere typo, something more sinister is clearly going on.

Although the paper cannot possibly own up, it's perfectly evident what's going on in this delicious golden oldie (1984) from the *Post*: "An article yesterday incorrectly identified the race of attorney Rufus King III, who was selected by President Reagan for a D.C. Superior Court judgeship." Stop right there. Can you guess? Yes, "King is white." What I especially love about this one is the suspicion that the Reagan people may have made the same mistake.

But from the poetical point of view, the best corrections are those that totally fail in their clarifying purpose, leaving the reader more contentedly bewildered than ever. A *Times* correction last month about "the political situation in Yugoslavia" (ripe material, to be sure) explained earnestly that "the information minister of Slovenia, Jelko Kacin . . . is the former Deputy Defense Minister of Slovenia, not of Croatia" and that "Listica . . . is in Bosnia and Herzegovina." Then there's this, from the June *Vanity Fair*:

> CORRECTION: In "Publish and Perish" by Bob Colacello in the April issue, Primrose Dunlop was referred to as Primrose Potter. Primrose Dunlop's mother is Lady Potter, whose first name is also Primrose.

Wonderful. Gilbert and Sullivan could set it to music.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

CORRESPONDENCE *continued from page 6*

that "South Africa's income distribution is among the most unequal anywhere." So, while Mr. Frederickson is keen to emphasize the impact of industrial capitalism, he does not seem to appreciate the difference between earnings from wages and income for all sources.

DONALD L. HOROWITZ
Durham, North Carolina

The writer is Charles S. Murphy Professor of Law and professor of political science at Duke University.

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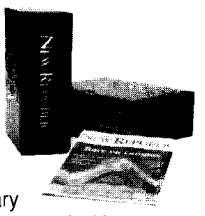

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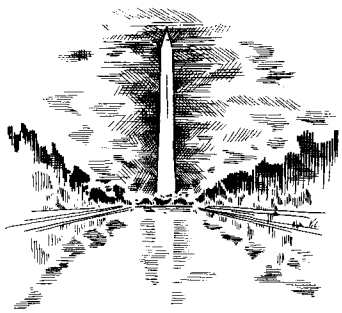
WASHINGTON DIARIST

Clean victory

BEFORE GEORGE BUSH LET SADdam Hussein out on furlough, the Gulf war was presented as an uncomplicated affair. Saddam was "worse" than Hitler, Churchill's "finest hour" became "the defining hour," and the sentence announcing the war's start—"the liberation of Kuwait has begun"—echoed Eisenhower's statement on D-Day: the rhetoric of the Good War. Yet Saddam still lurks in Baghdad. The 100-hour war has dragged on for the U.S. soldiers who have been belatedly assigned to shield the betrayed Kurds. And the president has expressed reserved sympathy for the prosecutors in the kangaroo courts of Kuwait. Now Bush has lectured the graduating class at Yale that we inhabit "a world of lesser evils" with "very few moral absolutes." His mission at New Haven was to arouse, if perhaps not compassion, then at least tolerance for the Chinese Communist tyranny.

WE HAVE ARRIVED AGAIN AT WHAT the historian Henry F. May, writing about the aftermath of World War I, described as "the end of American innocence." The only person blithely untouched by the disarray of the New World Order is the vice president. Laying a wreath at Arlington Cemetery on Memorial Day, Dan Quayle declared the war a "clean victory." The sanitation issue, in fact, is central. It does not refer to the plumbing in Dohuk, or to the plumbing in the vice president's mansion, which Quayle has conjectured is the cause of George, Barbara, and Millie Bush's autoimmune deficiencies, but to the administration's political need for the sterilized point of view. "Clean victory" is an inspired locution that captures better than any other so far the wishful thinking that there are no consequences: the good guys won, the movie is over, follow the signs to the exit. One would like to hear Quayle deliver a whole speech on the idea of the "clean victory." His minders should now be cobbling it together. It might be the definitive statement on the cognitive dissonance that Quayle has so naturally mastered.

GENERAL H. NORMAN SCHWARZkopf, who will march at the head of the mammoth parade in Washington on June 8, is the war's great heroic figure. Before it began, his most attractive quality was that he was not a trigger-happy hawk. His experience in Vietnam had made him thoughtful; his story of rescuing young soldiers in a mine field was both terrifying and reassuring. He had achieved a detachment that made him appear trustworthy. At his famous briefing describing the winning strategy, his performance turned the theater of war into his stage. His soliloquy of contempt for Saddam as a soldier seemed the coup de grace. Schwarzkopf's farewell address to the troops avoided braggadocio. Instead, he urged respect for Arabs and Islam because "that's the American way." It was like a storybook finish.



SINCE HIS RETURN home, however, the general has dismayingly lost self-control and become a preening demagogue. He has marched out a bullying version of the war that debases the principles that justified it. In his speech before Congress, he cheaply conflated all who doubted the policy of war before its commencement with "the flag-burners." In this, he overlooked the fact that he was among the chief worriers, who strenuously argued in public for sticking with sanctions. His objections were approvingly quoted at length in Senator Sam Nunn's floor speech during the debate over the war resolution. Then at West Point Schwarzkopf ranted against "military fairies"—his label for critics of certain aspects of old-line Pentagon thinking. (A spokesman lamely lied that "the term 'military fairies' was not meant as a slight to the gay and lesbian community.") Schwarzkopf's demeaning remark was intended as a swipe at the military reformers who had pioneered the strategy of maneuver, as opposed to attrition, that he had so brilliantly executed in the Gulf. (Some of the Pentagon brass believed that one advocate of reform in particular was gay, as if his sexuality made the case for the Pentagon's status quo.) Whether he is ultimately revealed as a Republican or a Democrat now seems irrelevant. This is a man with a temperament wildly unsuited for the democratic arena. He seems to plant land mines in order to step on them.

THE POLITICAL FUTURE OF GENeral Colin Powell, by contrast, may still hold promise. But if he desires such a future, it cannot be as a Republican. Anybody who reads Bob Woodward's *The Commanders* can almost effortlessly decipher that Powell was a major source. In his book, Woodward discloses that the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff favored a policy of containment rather than war. But this information is not what has made Powell untouchable for Republicans. It is that he has collaborated with Woodward, a figure who represents for the Republican right the devilish conspiracy of the liberal establishment press—the real evil empire. The possibility that Powell might be chosen by Bush as his running mate in 1992 must be categorically ruled out. (Why, in any case, would Bush thrust aside the constantly unformed Quayle for someone who can articulate complexities?) Burdened with the Woodward taint, Powell can never win votes on his own among Republicans. So he has only one alternative in politics—the Democratic Party. Attention, all natives of the Bronx who speak Yiddish and have shown executive abilities! The governorship of New York is open in 1994.

WAR HEROES DO NOT ALWAYS meet happy ends. When the war is over, sometimes the most treacherous part of their ordeal lies ahead. The example of Admiral George Dewey, who had dispatched the Spanish fleet off Manila Bay in 1898 with a notable lack of U.S. casualties, is bracing. After his spectacular victory ("You may fire when ready, Gridley"), Dewey was greeted by a tumultuous homecoming, feted by the social elites, cheered by the multitudes, and promoted in the press as the next Democratic candidate for president. In New York City a 200-foot-tall triumphal arch of wood and plaster was built to his glory. Alas, Dewey showed himself to be a vain, limited character. The subscription funds for the permanent arch lagged. Left to the elements, the temporary structure crumbled. Soon nothing remained of this monument of the "splendid little war" but its evanescent memory.

WATCHING THE GULF WAR VICtory parade will be an act of nostalgia, demanding the will to recapture the immediate postwar euphoria. Perhaps, afterward, Schwarzkopf should contemplate the fate of the Dewey Arch.

SIDNEY BLUMENTHAL

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WHERE WE STAND

aft

By Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers

Help For Kids Who Need It Most

People passing by an inner-city school may think it's filled with young people who can't or won't learn, but if they go inside they'll find two groups of kids.

The majority are youngsters who would like to learn. They aren't problem kids, but they sure have a problem. If they raise their hands to answer a question or cooperate with the teacher or do their homework and bring it in, they're likely to be ostracized or even beaten up by members of the second group, the kids who are hostile to learning.

Frequently, kids in this second group don't even come to school. When they do show up, they might spend the day sleeping in the back of the class; but when they choose, they can make life hell for teachers and other kids in their classes. And their shouting, fighting and pranks take so much of a teacher's time and attention that little work gets done.

The more of these anti-learning kids are in a classroom or school, the more likely they are to make the school a place where discipline is the main concern. But the opposite is true too, and if there are enough kids who want to learn, they will be able to set the tone. The trouble is, existing laws and procedures make it almost impossible to remove the troublemakers from a school. One result is that people are pressing to rescue kids who want to learn from public schools where learning has become secondary to keeping order. They say, "Let these kids go to private schools, and let the school district that has failed them pay."

Given the situation, this makes sense. But a voucher plan that puts the learning kids into private schools will turn public schools into custodial institutions for the disturbed and disruptive—places that are little better than prisons. And while such a plan will save one group of kids, it abandons the other group. Why not try for something that could save both?

Why shouldn't we leave the public school kids who are learning right where they are and send the others to private schools? There's little point in moving a kid who is already successful; and the youngsters who are motivated, but fearful in the current atmosphere, will be likely to start working when the atmosphere changes. There's even less point in letting the kids who have given up on school—and whose schools have probably given up on them—stay where they are.

But what if we gave these kids who are doing so badly a second chance? What if they went to new schools, places that they didn't associate with failing—and getting away with murder? Places where they would be surrounded by kids who were working and learning. Of course lots of them would be no better off than they are in their current public schools, but according to what we hear about private school successes, a large number of them would improve enormously and leave high school with the skills they need to get real jobs or enter college.

A good idea? I think so. And it's not even a new one. Barbara Lerner, a psychologist and lawyer, proposed it over ten years ago in a book called *Minimum Competence, Maximum Choice* (New York: Irvington, 1980). Lerner's scheme involved giving public schools three years to succeed with a kid and, if they failed, allowing the kid to go to private school at public expense for three more years. As she said, it would help the kids who needed help most: "All failing children stand to benefit, but because poor children and black children fail more often than children from other groups, they would benefit more than others in direct proportional terms." And the scheme would benefit neighborhood schools as well as the kids by "giving successful youngsters who want to remain a fighting chance to maintain and build on their successes, forming positive peer cultures that encourage other educationally successful youngsters to stay and educationally marginal ones to bring their performance up to standard."

But, despite all the things going for this proposal, nobody jumped on the Lerner bandwagon, and the reason is pretty obvious. Supporters of private-school choice talk about how much private schools can do for poor and minority kids. But private schools are not interested in taking poor and minority—or even white—students who are in big trouble in their current schools, the ones who really need a second chance. They prefer kids who are doing well in school. They insist on the right to choose and the right to expel kids they can't deal with. And really you can't blame them. Private schools are just that; they are not public institutions, and they do not have a responsibility to all students; only to the ones they choose.

The word *choice* sounds great, but there won't be any choice for kids who are not accepted by private schools—and they are the kids in greatest need. How can we make sure they get into school under a choice plan? Simple. Instead of letting private schools choose, let the public schools choose students who are most in need of help—the students who are failing in attendance, discipline and academic achievement. Is there any doubt that public schools would pick the right students? And is there any doubt about the private schools' response to a system of choice in which they didn't get to do the choosing?

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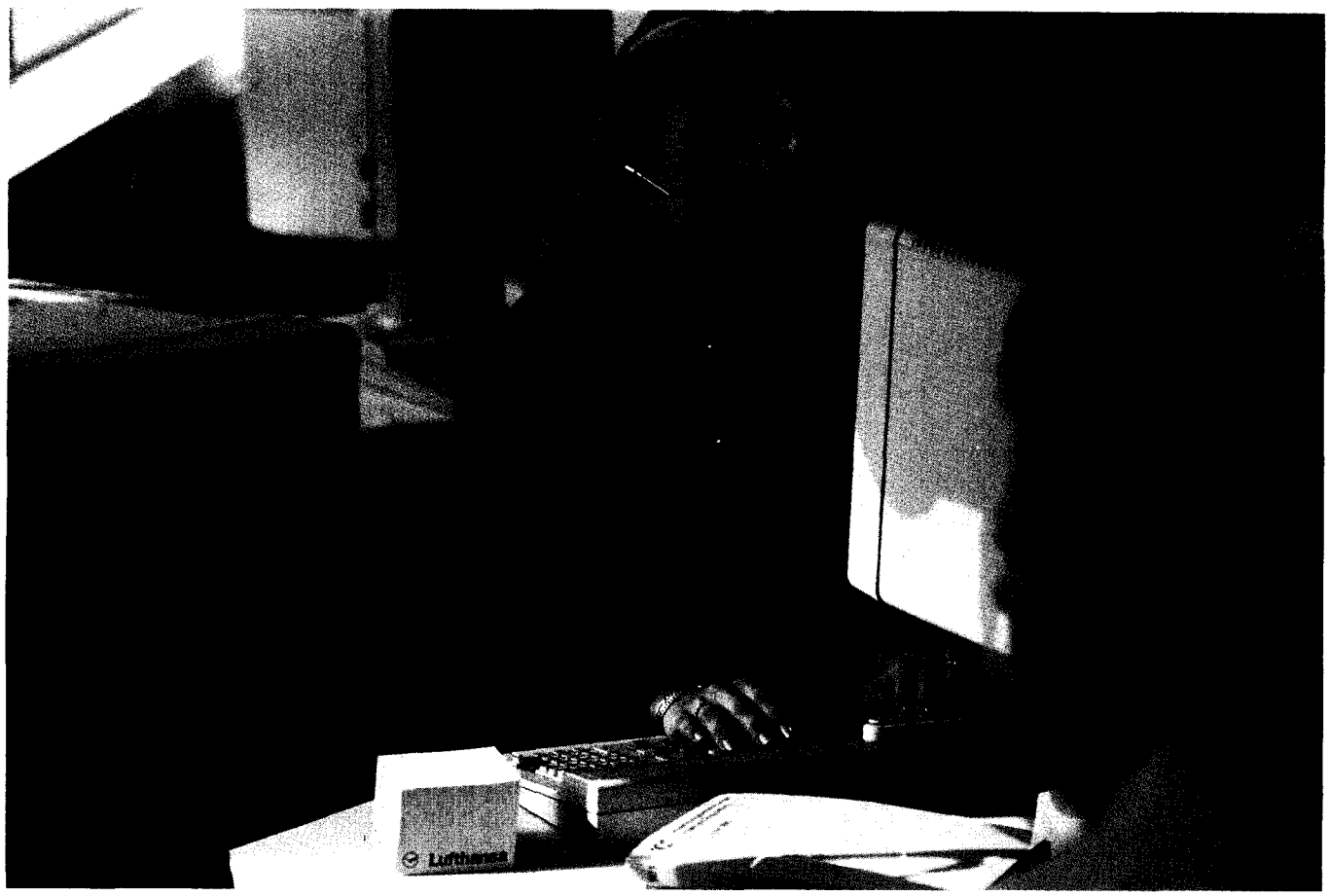

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